

Blackstone Site Prioritization Plan

Written by CMRPC in partnership
with the Town of Blackstone
July 17, 2025

Introduction

In 2024, the Town of Blackstone partnered with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) to study the reuse and redevelopment of a collection of underutilized, vacant, and/or tax title properties in town. Study sites are outlined in the [Site Map and Background chapter](#).

The plan involved the following actions and tasks:

- Site background research
- Community engagement (including a community survey and stakeholder interviews)
- Identification of obstacles to reuse and redevelopment
- Assessing potential reuse and redevelopment options

This project was funded by a Fiscal Year 2024 Community Compact Best Practice grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Prior Planning

The Town of Blackstone has conducted a variety of prior planning projects. Some of these plans are discussed below.

2007 Veterans Park Renovation

Master Plan

In 2007, the Town of Blackstone consulted with Gale Associates, Inc. to develop a Master Plan for the renovation of Veterans Park, located on Elm Street near the Bellingham border. The resulting Master Plan studied the environmental and site characteristics of Veterans Park and proposed an alternative schematic design for athletic fields.



MASTER PLAN
2018

2018 Master Plan

Blackstone's Master Plan laid out the Town's strategic priorities for the near future. Several of the Master Plan's goals directly relate to economic development, such as: "Reduce tax burden on residents" and "Encourage economic development." A subcategory under the latter goal was "Identify available parcels," which closely aligns with the spirit of this site prioritization project. The Master Plan identified several opportunity areas within town, such as Main Street and a collection of parcels between Elm Street and Bellingham Road and east of Quick Stream, some of which are included in this study. Veterans Park was also identified as an opportunity area for new housing.

2018 Town Center Mixed Use Zoning Analysis

The Town Center Mixed Use Zoning Analysis recommended amendments to the Blackstone Zoning Bylaw to encourage mixed use development in the Main Street / Route 122 corridor area of town. The project consisted of an analysis of existing conditions, a review of the Blackstone Zoning Bylaw, and preparation of zoning amendments to the Village Overlay District. A review of the current Blackstone Zoning Bylaw indicates that none of these recommendations have been implemented to date.



HOUSING PRODUCTION PLAN

2019 Housing Production Plan

Housing production plans outline a community's strategy for planning and developing housing, specifically affordable housing as defined by Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 40B. Blackstone's 2019 Housing Production Plan analyzed the town's demographics and existing housing market to inform its recommendations. The plan's overall goal was to "Provide a diverse range of housing types to serve a variety of lifestyles and life stages." Specific sub-goals that expanded upon this objective included: (1) Identify regulatory and infrastructure measures that encourage "aging-in-place" and additional over-55 housing; (2) Promote use of the Flexible Residential Development Bylaw; (3) Encourage mixed uses in Commercial districts.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

2023



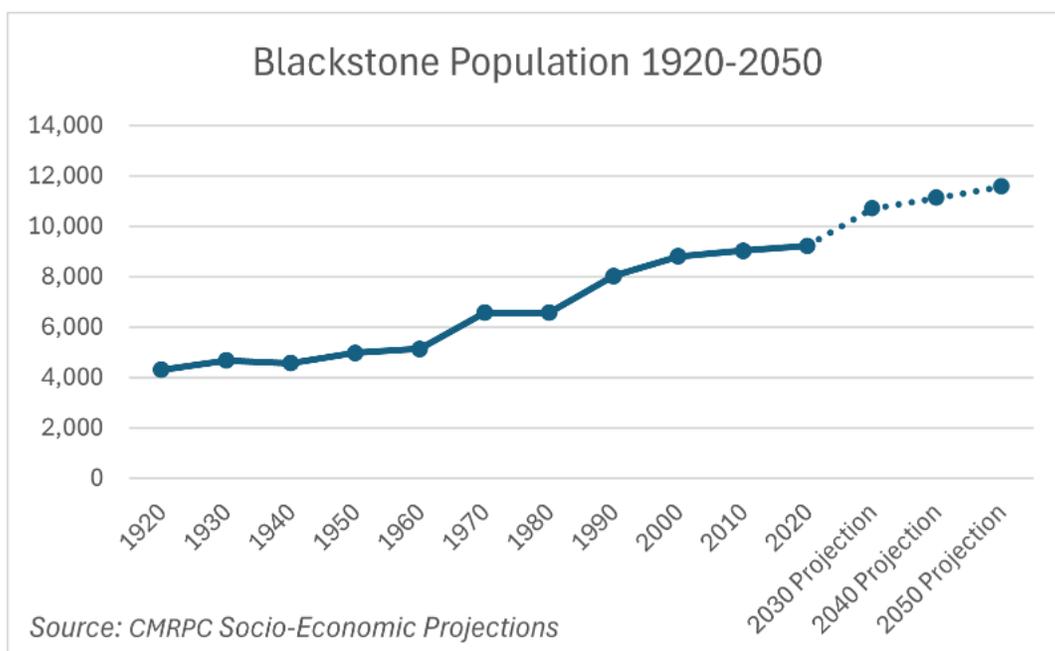
2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan

The 2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan cataloged Blackstone's environmental features and open space and recreation assets and identified related goals and objectives.

Relevant objectives included: 1) Identify land with potential for hiking and/or bike trails; 2) Increase connections to Blackstone Greenway and Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT); and 3) Identify areas for potential new playing fields.

Planning Context

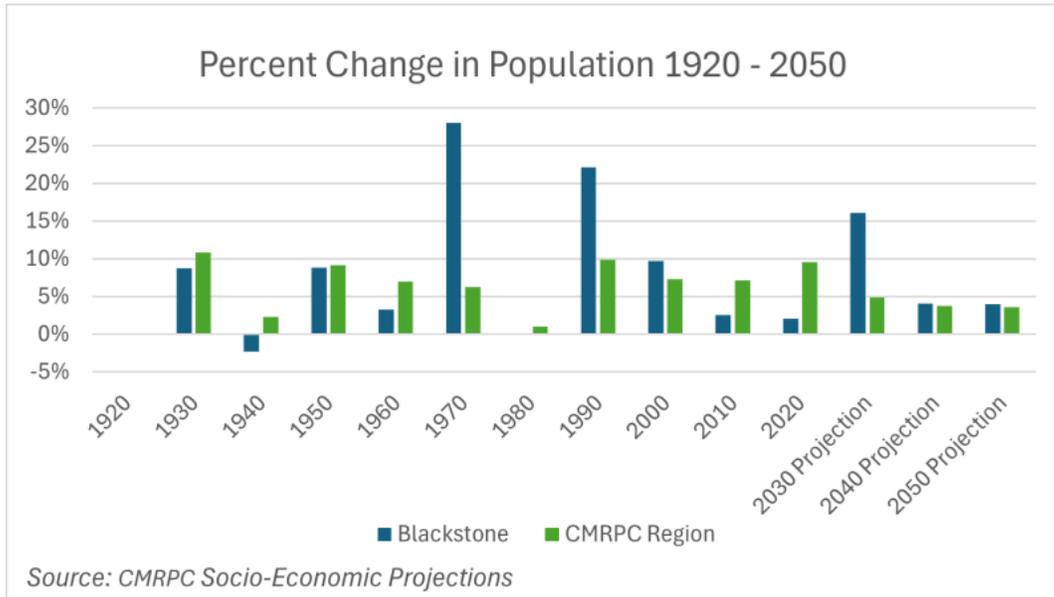
The Town of Blackstone is located in Worcester County near the Rhode Island border. The town has a population of 9,250 and remains largely undeveloped, with a quiet and rural landscape.



Blackstone Population 1920-2050

Blackstone experienced significant population growth between 1960 and 2000. In the years outside this period, population growth was small. The town's population is projected to continue to grow through 2050.

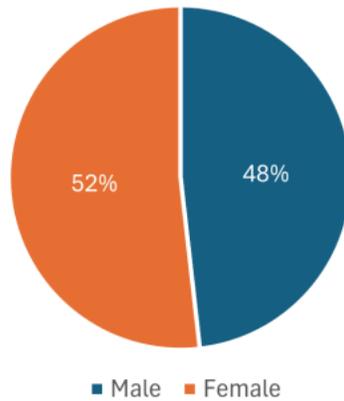
(Scroll down to see next slide.)



Percent Change in Population 1920-2050

The percent change of population in Blackstone exhibits a pattern similar to that of the CMRPC region (central and southern Worcester County), with both being expected to continue to see population growth over the next few decades.

Blackstone Population by Gender (2023)

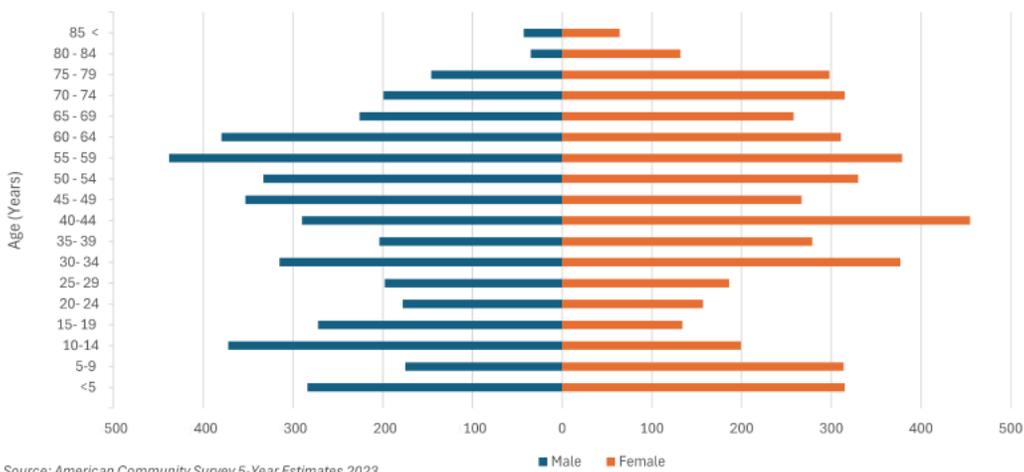


Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2023

Population by Gender

In Blackstone, the population is split relatively evenly by gender, with the 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate reporting that 52% of the population identifies as female and 48% male.

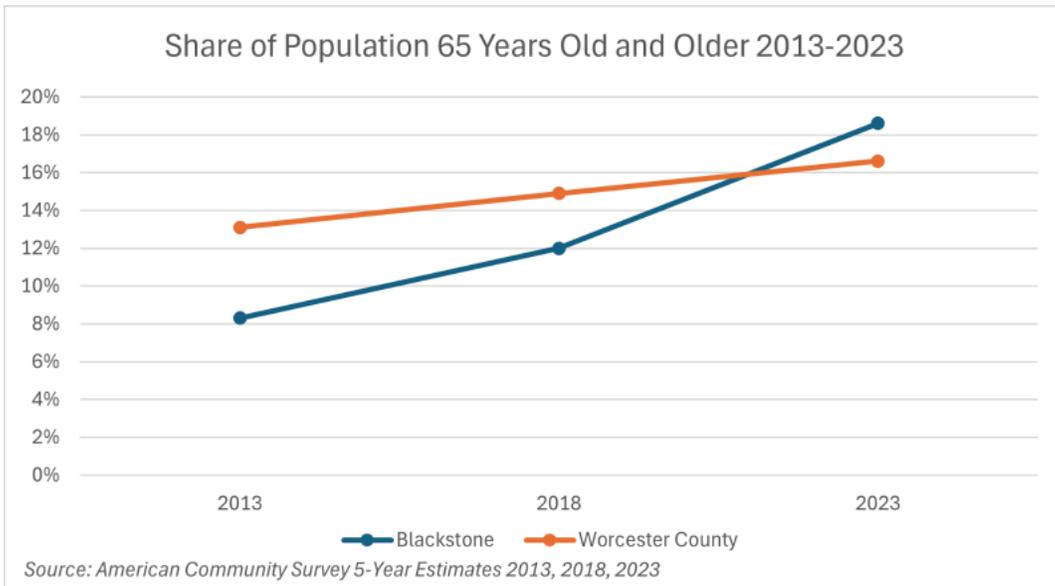
Age and Gender Histogram



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2023

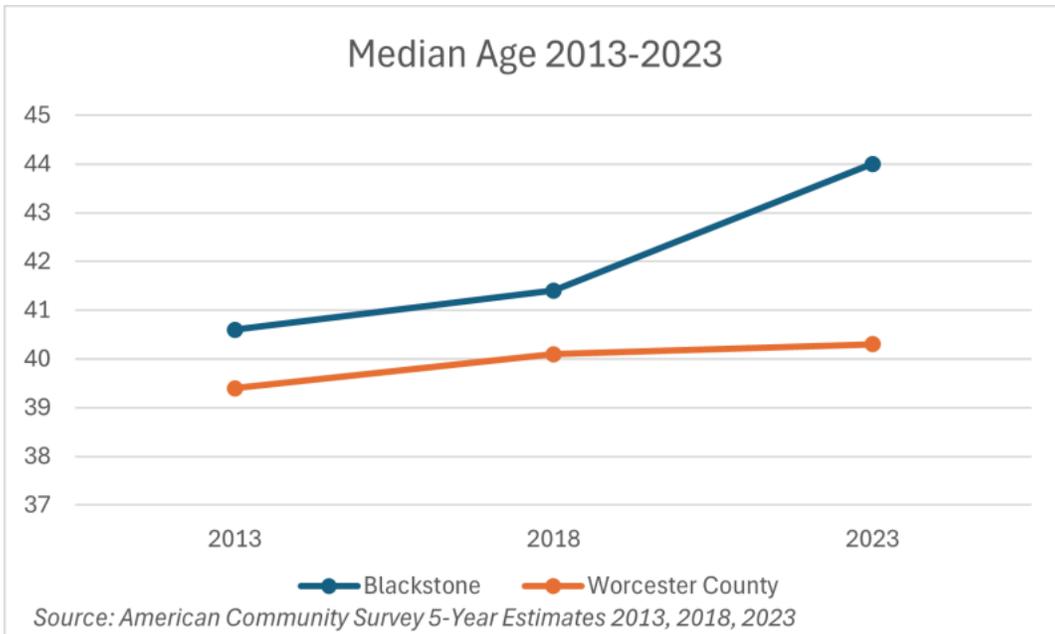
Age and Gender

There is a fairly balanced age distribution in Blackstone. One characteristic that stands out is that there is a large population of residents approaching age 60. There are also few residents aged 20-24 and 25-29 relative to other age groups.



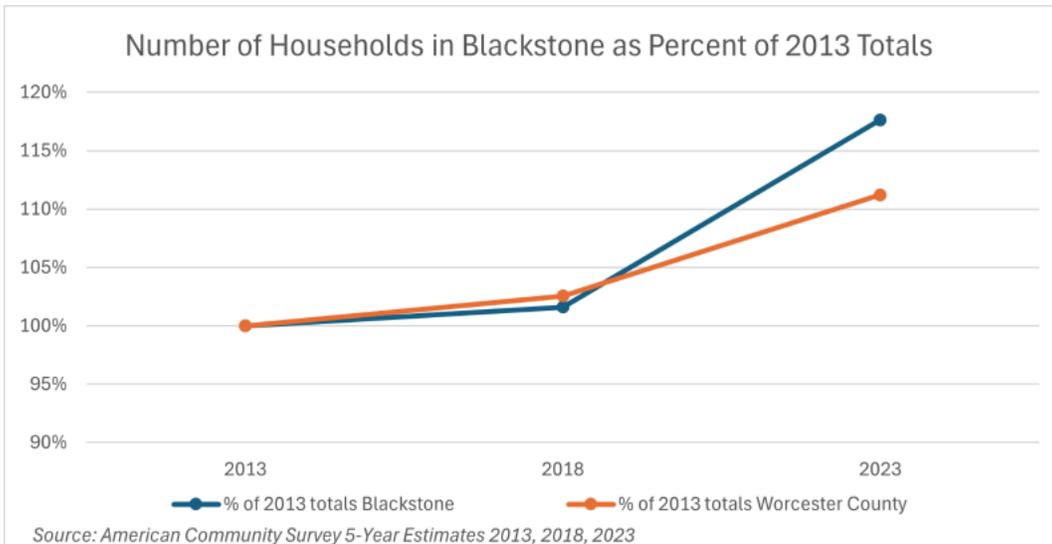
Share of Population Age 65+

The population of residents age 65 or more has risen rather rapidly since 2013 and has been higher than the county average since 2020.



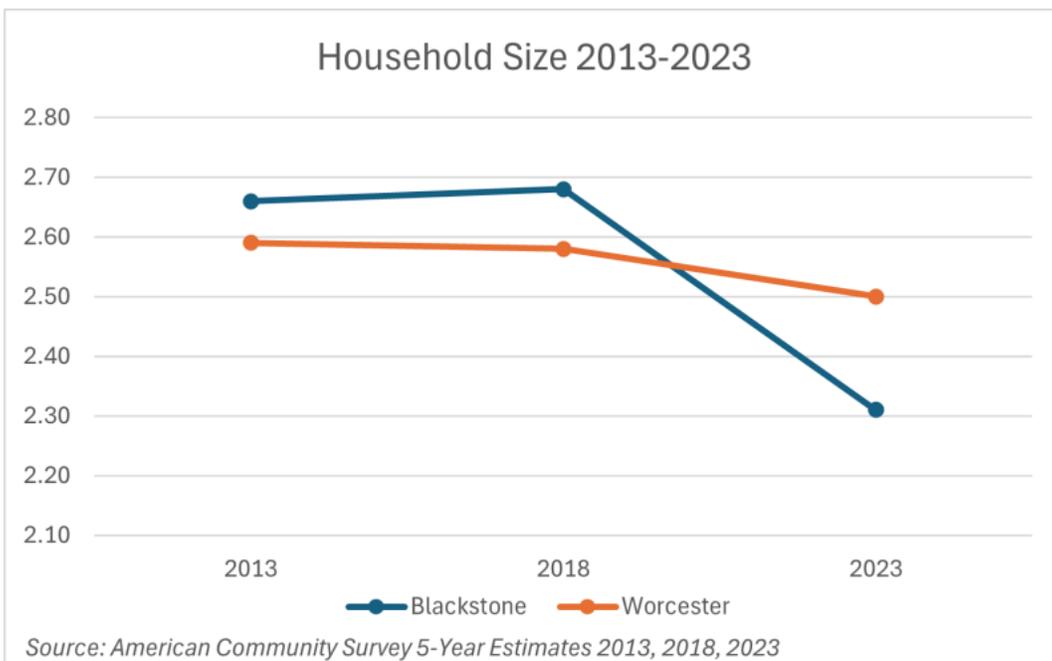
Median Age

The median age in Blackstone is 4 years older than the median age in the county, coming in at 44 and 40 respectively.



Households

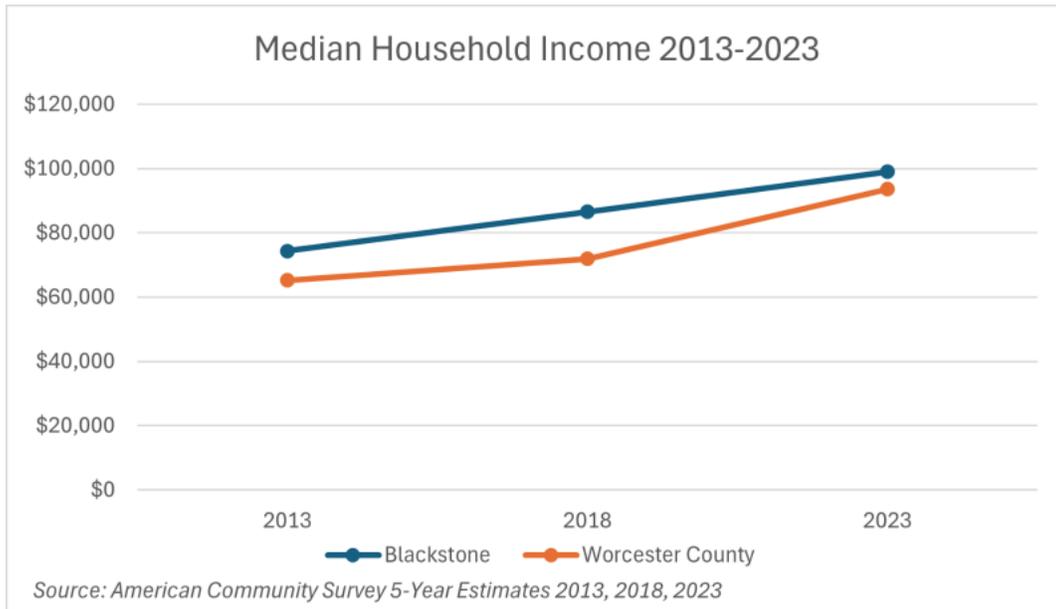
The number of households in Blackstone is growing, with an 18% increase between 2013 and 2023. A similar pattern of growth is seen in Worcester County, which has experienced an 11% increase. This change in household numbers aligns with Blackstone's rising population.



Household Size

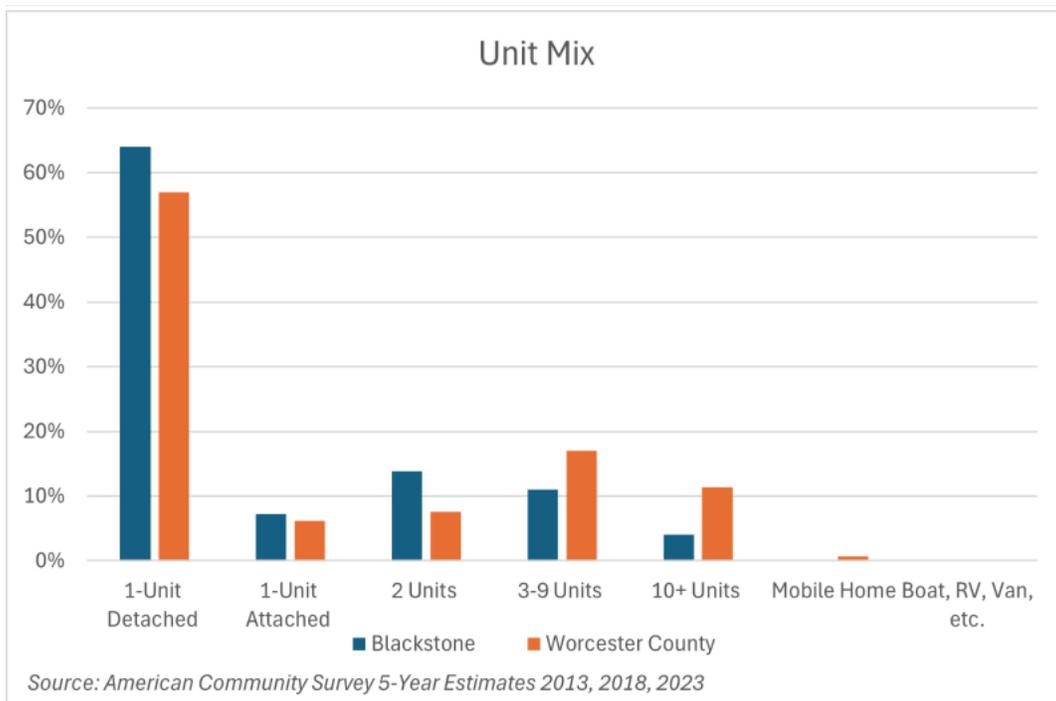
While the number of households in Blackstone is rising, the size of households is decreasing. Since 2013, the household size in Blackstone has decreased from 2.66 people to 2.31

people. In comparison, the household size in Worcester County has remained steadier, decreasing by only 0.09 since 2013.



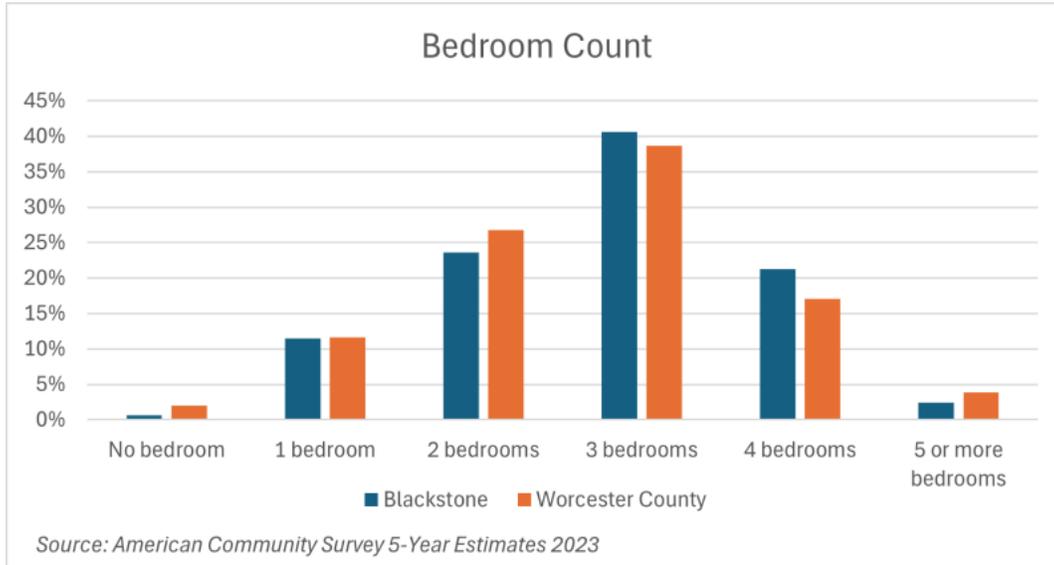
Median Household Income

The median household income in Blackstone has been consistently higher than the median household income in Worcester County. However, the two are rising at a similar pace.



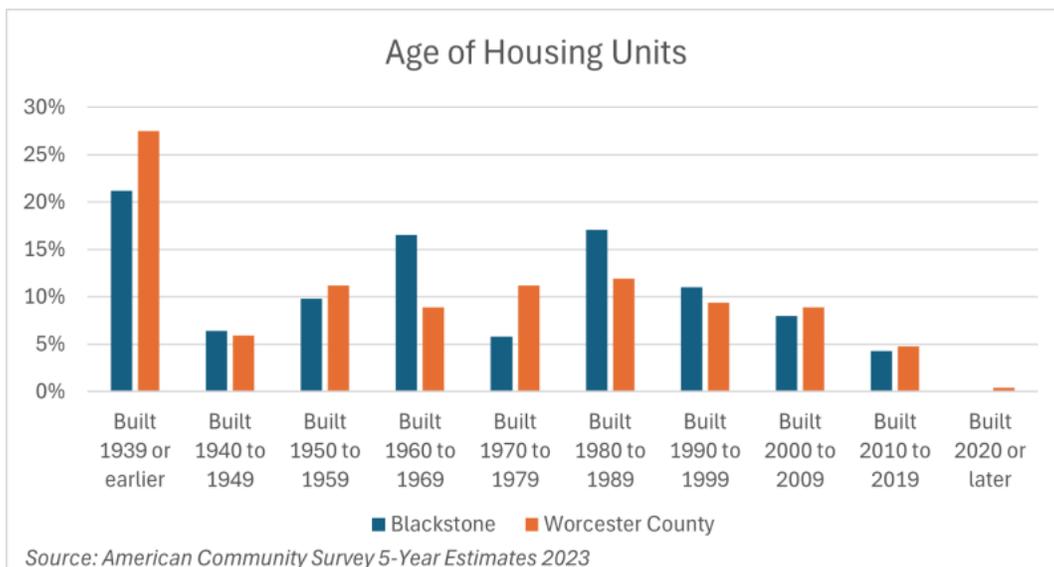
Housing Unit Mix

The majority of housing units in both Blackstone and Worcester County are 1-unit detached, also known as single-family homes. There are few multi-unit forms of housing in Blackstone.



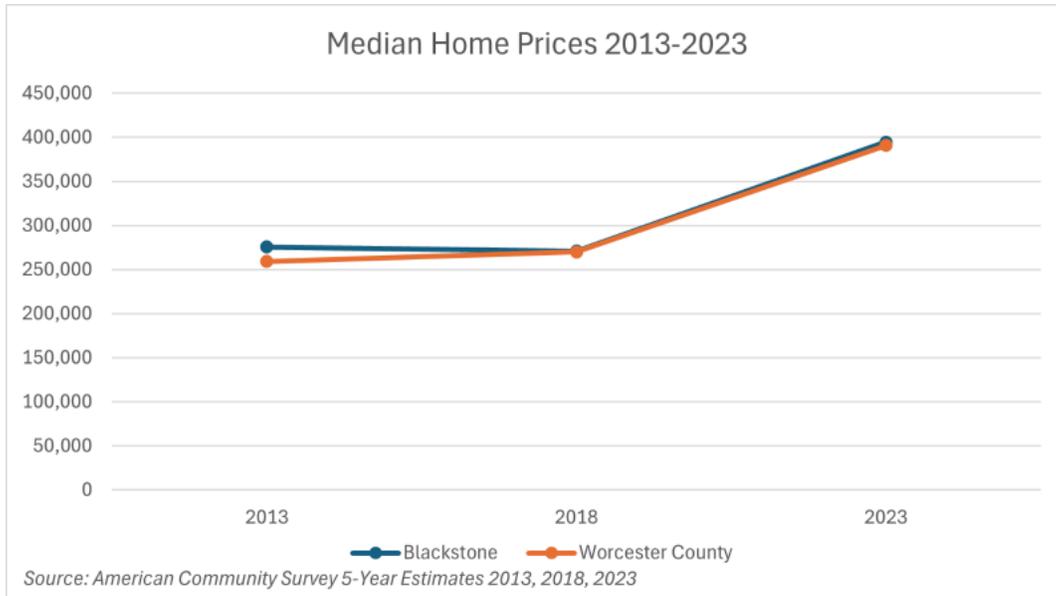
Bedroom Count

The majority of housing units in both Blackstone and Worcester County have three bedrooms. As the average household size in Blackstone decreases, there may be more demand for residential units with fewer bedrooms.



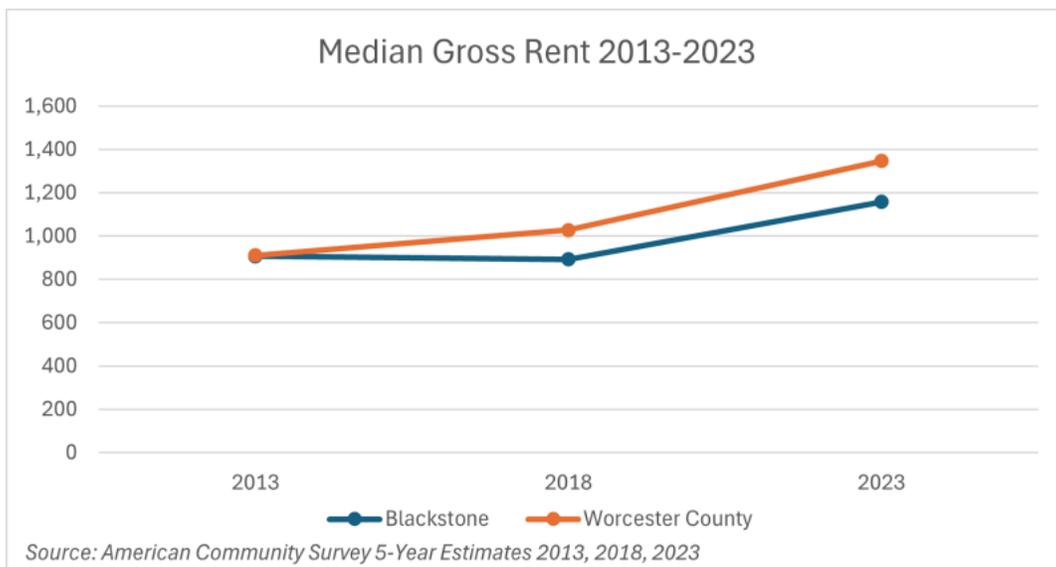
Age of Housing

The housing stock of Blackstone and Worcester County is old, with over a fifth of the housing built in 1939 or earlier. Blackstone in particular is lacking in new housing, with the 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates reporting that no new housing has been built since 2019.



Median Home Prices

As is the case in Worcester County, home prices in Blackstone are rising. Over the last ten years, median home prices in Blackstone have increased over \$100,000.



Median Rental Prices

While the median rent price in Blackstone has risen since 2013, it remains lower than the median rental price in Worcester County.

Blackstone Tenancy Breakdown



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2023

Worcester County Tenancy Breakdown

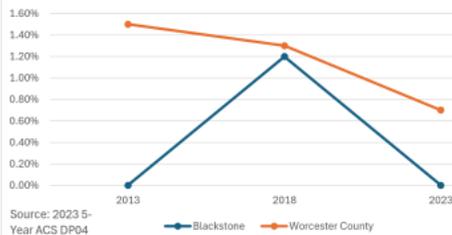


Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2023

Tenancy

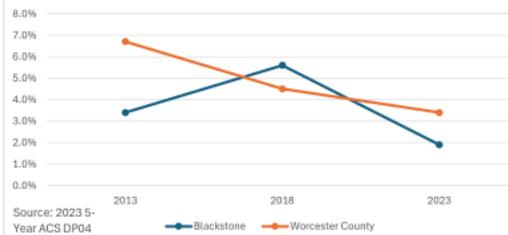
Mirroring the tenancy patterns in Worcester County, Blackstone has higher rates of owner-occupied housing than renter occupied.

Homeowner Vacancy Rate 2013-2023



Source: 2023 5-Year ACS DP04

Rental Vacancy Rate 2013-2023



Source: 2023 5-Year ACS DP04

Vacancy Rates

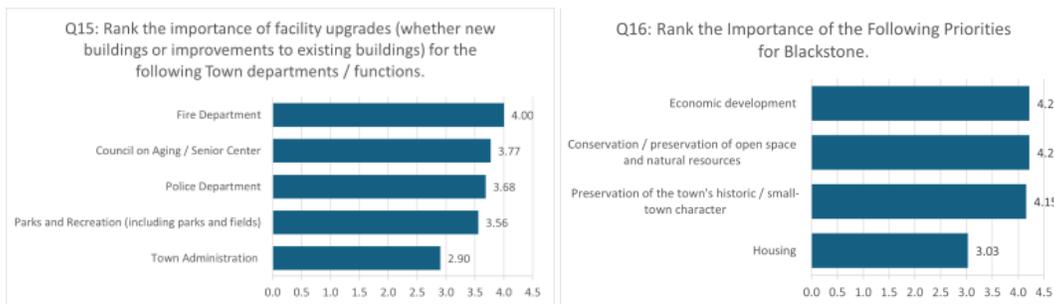
Unit vacancy rates are also quite low in Blackstone, with the homeowner vacancy rate being reported as 0% in 2023 and

the rental vacancy rate being reported as under 2%. Rates are subject to standard error (i.e., inconsistencies between estimates and actual conditions).

Survey Results

Between May and June 2025, CMRPC and the Town of Blackstone disseminated a survey to solicit feedback from community members on the Town's needs and priorities in the areas of economic development, housing, and municipal facilities. The survey was available in digital and paper formats.

80 responses to the survey were collected. The results to most survey questions are presented below, along with key takeaways.



Use the arrows to shift between images. Click on a chart to enlarge the chart and see additional details.

Key Survey Takeaways

Community members are looking for variety when it comes to economic development.

Survey respondents note that there is demand for grocery stores/supermarkets, restaurants/brewpubs/other food amenities, and for entertainment/recreational activities. Further, as noted in the response to Question 3, there is a desire for non-residential development in town, with respondents preferring commercial and mixed-use land uses.

The Town Center is visited often but is in need of upgrades.

While the Town Center is visited often, with 35% of respondents noting they visit the area daily, results note that the space is in need of changes. Respondents currently describe the town center as “dead”, “underutilized”, and “tired”, noting that the area is lacking character and could use upgrades to draw visitors. Increased food, beverage, and shopping options are desirable, as well as an increase in fairs and events. Respondents would also like to see improvements to the nature-based amenities of the area and the pedestrian infrastructure.

Community members favor low-moderate density forms of housing and believe increased housing options are needed to accommodate all age groups.

Respondents felt that low-moderate density forms of housing (i.e., small-medium sized single-family homes, accessory dwelling units, and cottage housing) were the most desirable. Sparsely developed parts of town (i.e., North Blackstone, West Blackstone, and East Blackstone Village) were identified as priority locations for new residential development. At the same time however, respondents also placed great value in the preservation of open space and natural resources.

First-time homebuyers, families, and seniors were noted to be the population groups most in need of increased housing options. Open-response comments on the survey indicate that

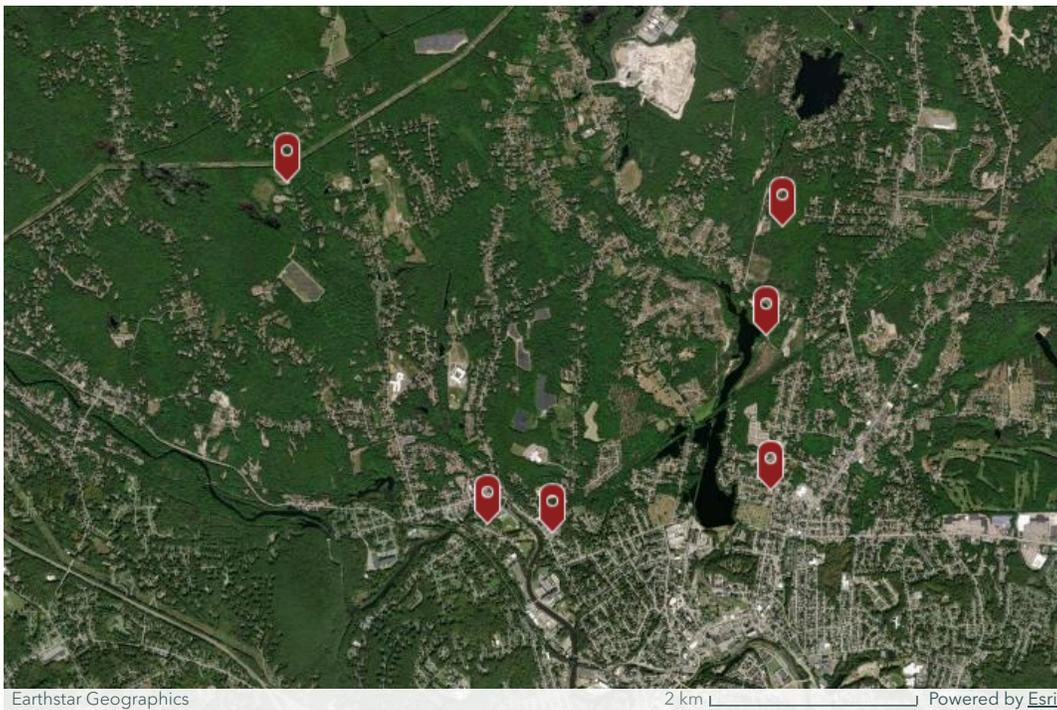
housing affordability, especially for seniors and renters, is a concern for community members.

Park 'n Shop and St. Theresa's Church should be priorities for reuse and redevelopment.

Survey participants were asked if there were any underutilized or vacant properties in Blackstone that they believe would benefit from redevelopment or revitalization. Many participants identified the former Park 'n Shop on Main St. and St. Theresa's Church on Rathbun St. as priorities in their open-response answers.

Site Map and Background

Click on the tabs at left to zoom in on a site on the map and see additional details.



Kimball Sands Properties

Address: Elm St. (vacant; no street number)



Veterans Park

Address: Elm Street (vacant; no street number)



St. Theresa's Church

Address: 630 Rathbun Street



Park 'n Shop

Address: 2 Main Street



St. Paul St. Residential Lot

Address: 23 Saint Paul St.



Main Street Corridor

Address: Main Street



Auto Salvage Yard

Address: 22 Chestnut Street

Site Specific Analysis

Analysis was compiled for each of the study sites. Depending on site context, this includes analysis of zoning regulations, environmental regulations, infrastructure availability, potential reuse / redevelopment scenarios, and more.

Kimball Sands Properties



Zoning

The Kimball Sands Properties are zoned R-2 and partly located in the Groundwater Protection District (see Environmental Analysis).

Permitted Uses in the R-2 District include:

- Municipal uses (by right)
- Single-family dwellings (by right)
- Two-family dwellings (by right)
- Nursing, convalescent, or rest home (Special Permit)
- Flexible residential development (Special Permit)

When combined, the properties satisfy the minimum lot size and frontage requirements for the R-2 District.

Site / Zoning District	Lot Size (acres)	Lot Frontage (feet)
Kimball Sands Properties (actual)	130.5	~310
R-2 District (minimum)	1.5	185

Environmental Analysis - Wetlands

There are several wetlands resource areas on the site, as indicated by the MassDEP Wetlands Data Layer.

Any activity to alter these features or land within their buffer zones requires filing a Notice of Intent (NOI) with the Blackstone Conservation Commission in order to receive an Order of Conditions. The normal buffer zone for wetlands features is 100 ft., but the Blackstone Wetlands Bylaw increases this distance to 150 ft. for wetlands features within the "public water supply catchment basin." (Section 119-2).



Wetlands resource areas.
(Click on image to enlarge).

Other rules to consider from the Blackstone Wetlands Bylaw include:

- Subdivision Setback: “any new subdivision which proposes construction bordering a wetland and is determined to negatively impact the wetland due to alteration or runoff will be required to provide a construction setback amounting to between 5% and 10% of the subdivision land” (Section 119-11(C))
- Building Setback: “Every proposed building shall have a one-hundred-foot setback from any wetlands, bank, marsh, wet meadows, bog, swamp, creek, river, stream, ford, lake or one-hundred-year floodplain” (Section 119-12(B))

Any fill of BVW would trigger performance standards under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (WPA), including:

- **Fill Limits:** Without overcoming the presumption that BVWs are vital to safeguarding the public drinking water supply, natural habitats, floodwater management and other WPA interests, only 5,000 sq. ft., of the resource area may be altered (310 CMR 10.55(4)(b))
- **Replacement Area:** Replacement area equal in size to the area that will be lost must be provided (310 CMR 10.55(4)(b)(1))

Depending on the scale of BVW fill, additional state and federal permits may be necessary:

- Army Corp of Engineers General Permit 17
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation
- MassDEP 401 Water Quality Certification

Environmental Analysis - Endangered Species

Priority Habitat is present on the western edge of the Kimball Sands Properties. Per the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA; 321 CMR 10.00), Priority Habitat is the geographic extent of habitat for species listed on the Massachusetts list of Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern species. Any projects or activities that take place in Priority Habitat must file for review with MassWildlife's Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP).

The NHESP review determines whether the project would result in the "Take" (i.e., harm, harassment, destruction of habitat, etc.) of any Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern species. Projects that involve the "Taking" of State-listed species require a Conservation and Management Permit. Certain activities may also be granted a No Take Determination if they comply with specific performance standards.

Because the Priority Habitat is located on the edge of the site, it could likely be avoided in a redevelopment scenario.

Environmental Analysis - Wellhead Protection

The Zone II wellhead protection zone for nearby public water wells (i.e., the Blackstone Groundwater Protection District)



Click on image to enlarge.

covers some of the site. Per the Blackstone Zoning Bylaw (Section 123-23.1 (E)(1)(b)) and state drinking water regulations (310 CMR 22.21(2)(b)(7)), rendering impervious more than 15 percent or 2,500 sq. ft. of a lot, whichever is greater, in a Zone II / the Groundwater Protection District is prohibited unless a system for artificial recharge is provided that will not result in degradation of groundwater quality.

The Massachusetts Stormwater Handbook Volume I Table CA 3 Standard 6 outlines stormwater best management practices to comply with the requirement for artificial recharge.

The Blackstone Zoning Bylaw requires Special Permit approval from the Planning Board in order to surpass the 15 percent / 2,500 sq. ft. new impervious area limit (Section 123-23.1 (E)(1)(b)).

Zone II wellhead protection areas are also designated as nitrogen sensitive areas under state sewage / septage disposal regulations (310 CMR 15.214). New construction in nitrogen sensitive areas is not allowed to install septic systems that receive more than 440 gallons of design flow per day per acre per except when special systems or aggregation is used (310 CMR 15.215(1)). An acre is 40,000 sq. ft. per 310 CMR 15.002.

However, public sewer is available on Elm Street, meaning septic systems would not be necessary.

Environmental Analysis - Other Permitting

Permits that may be required, depending on the scale of future development, include:

- Blackstone Land Disturbance Permit: “A permit must be obtained prior commencement of land-disturbing activity that may result in the disturbance of an area of 20,000 square feet or more” (Blackstone General Bylaws Section 110-6(A)). Compliance requires an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan.
- US EPA National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction General Permit: Applies when development disturbs one or more acres of land. Compliance requires a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) to minimize the amount of sediment and



Click on image to enlarge.

other pollutants associated with construction sites from being discharged in stormwater runoff.

- Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act

Environmental Analysis - Topography

The elevation of the Kimball Sands Properties increases from west to east. In the northern half of the lot, the elevation increase is approximately 70 feet from boundary to boundary. A steep ridge runs down the middle of the northern half of the lot. Based on aerial imagery, this appears to be from historical sand and gravel removal on the site.

In the southern half of the lot, the elevation increase is approximately 50 feet from boundary to boundary. The southeast corner of the lot features some steep slopes, again apparently from sand and gravel removal.

These slopes may restrict the amount of land on the site that can be developed.



Click on map and move arrow to shift map focus. Use the (+) and (-) buttons to zoom in and out, respectively.

Infrastructure

Public water and sanitary sewer are present where the site borders Elm Street, according to maps on file with the Blackstone Department of Public Works (DPW).

Under the Water Management Act (MGL Chapter 21G), MassDEP permits the amount of water that a Town can withdraw from ground and surface water sources. Blackstone's DPW reported that the Town's demand for water (measured on a daily rolling average) is close to the maximum safe yield permitted by MassDEP. In these circumstances, the Town should be careful to consult with the DPW about the feasibility of water main extensions or significant new development serviced by public water.

Reuse & Redevelopment

Commercial Reuse

The Kimball Sands Properties were identified as an opportunity zone for economic development in Blackstone's 2018 Master Plan. That said, the site's R-2 zoning designation does not allow for any commercial or industrial uses. This could be addressed with a new overlay district.

In recent years, mixed-use plazas that couple retail and apartments have been constructed in several Massachusetts towns. These include Maynard Crossing in Maynard, MA; Meadow Walk in Sudbury, MA; MarketStreet Lynnfield in Lynnfield, MA; and Woburn Village in Woburn, MA. At more than 130 acres in size, the Kimball Sands site is far larger than these case studies, most of which are around 50 acres of land. This indicates that the mixed-use plaza concept present in the case studies could theoretically be applied to the site.



Case studies of recent mixed-use developments in other Massachusetts communities. (Click on images to enlarge).

Downtown Crossing in Maynard, MA presents a case study of a development in a similarly sized community to Blackstone. The average daily private automobile traffic volume at the Maynard site in Fall 2019 (i.e., before it opened) was similar to that of Route 126 in Bellingham in Fall 2024 [1]. Route 126 is located in close proximity to the Kimball Sands Properties.

Site	Roadway	Daily Car Volume
Downtown Crossing (Maynard)	Route 27 (Maynard)	~19,500
Kimball Sands Properties (Blackstone)	Route 126 (Bellingham)	~20,900

Source: Replica. "Network Link Analysis."

Time Period
Weekday, Fall 2019
Weekday, Fall 2024

Source: Replica. "Network Link Analysis."

However, the demographic profile of Downtown Crossing's trade area (i.e., up to 20 minutes' drive time from the site) significantly differs from that of Kimball Sands. For instance, the spending potential index (100 = national average) for Food Away from Home for Downtown Crossing is 189 compared to 115 for Kimball Sands [2]. This discrepancy in index scores extends to all other consumer spending categories, as the market profiles below show.

Downtown Crossing Market Profile

Kimball Sands Market Profile

Furthermore, the case studies of mixed-use developments in other communities are all anchored by a large grocery retailer. As the "[Reuse - Grocery Store](#)" section of the [Park 'n Shop chapter](#) demonstrates, a new grocery store in Blackstone would face competition from existing grocery stores in neighboring communities.

Residential Reuse

Another potential use for the site is residential development. Single-family and two-family dwellings are allowed by right in the R-2 District.

Even if a third of the lot's land area is conservatively discounted to factor in limitations from wetlands and steep slopes, 98 acres of land area would remain to accommodate development. Based on the minimum required lot size in the R-2 Zoning District (1.5 acres), the site could be subdivided into more than 60 new lots (0.6 lots per acre). At a denser development scale, such as cottage housing (an existing example in Norfolk features 4.5 lots per acre), the site could fit as many as 440 new lots. Cottage housing communities consist of small, single-family dwelling units clustered around common areas.



Sample photos of ~1.5 acre single-family lot (left) and cottage housing community (right) in Massachusetts. (Click images to enlarge.)

Given its size and ecological features, like wetlands and forest, the site is an ideal candidate for the Town's Flexible Development Bylaw. The Flexible Development Bylaw allows for flexible density regulations when subdividing lots in exchange for preserving some of the lot as open space. But in this scenario, only around 60 lots could be created; the Flexible Development Bylaw prescribes that the number of building lots that can be created is that which could be expected under a conventional subdivision plan (Section 123-13.1(D)(1)).

The zoning in the R-2 District does not allow for the density required to build cottage housing. The Town could be proactive and introduce a new overlay district for the Kimball Sands Properties and other vacant lots, such as the [former Auto Salvage Yard at 22 Chestnut St.](#) Another option is a friendly MGL Chapter 40B development.

Development at the scales described above would come with new demand placed on Town infrastructure. The site has access to public water and sanitary sewer via Elm Street. Infrastructure analysis assumes that each lot contains one dwelling unit and/or household.

Development Scenario	Sewage Flow (gallons per day per bedroom)*	Bedrooms
Conventional Subdivision	110	3
Cottage Housing Subdivision	110	2

* Sourced from State sewage flow standards (310 CMR 15.203); ** Some land area discounted to account for roads

Lots	Total Sewage Flow (gallons per day)
~63**	20,790
440	96,800

* Sourced from State sewage flow standards (310 CMR 15.203); ** Some land area discounted to account for roads

Development Scenario	Lots / Households	Average Household Size*
Conventional Subdivision	~63	2.31
Cottage Housing Subdivision	440	2.31

* Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. 2023;
 **Source: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

Persons	Blackstone 2024 Residential Gallons per Capita Day (gallons / capita / day)**	Water Demand (gallons per day)
146	40	5,840
1,016	40	40,640

* Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. 2023;
 **Source: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

Veterans Park



Drone photos of Veterans Park. (Click on images to enlarge.)

Zoning

The Veterans Park site is zoned R-2 and is located in the Groundwater Protection District (see Environmental Analysis).

Permitted Uses in the R2 District include:

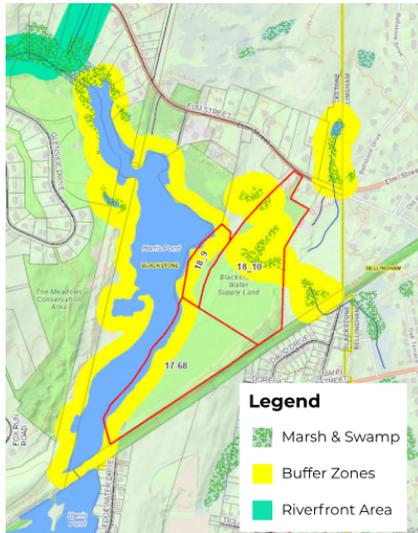
- Municipal uses (by right)
- Single-family dwellings (by right)
- Two-family dwellings (by right)
- Nursing, convalescent, or rest home (Special Permit)
- Flexible residential development (Special Permit)

Veterans Park satisfies the minimum lot size for the R2 District but has inadequate lot frontage.

Site / Zoning District	Lot Size (acres)	Lot Frontage (feet)
Veterans Park (actual)	39.5	~100
R2 District (minimum)	1.5	185

Although the lot lacks adequate frontage, it appears to meet the criteria of a "pre-existing nonconforming lot." Pre-existing non-conforming lots are lots that were in existence prior to the introduction of or changes to local zoning codes. Pre-existing non-conforming lots are protected from changes to

minimum dimensional requirements introduced after the lot's establishment (MGL Chapter 40A Section 6 and Section 123-12(C) of the Blackstone Zoning Bylaw). One of the two parcels that makes up the Veterans Park lot is included in a deed dated 1961, prior to the adoption of Blackstone's Zoning Bylaw in 1968. [3]



Environmental Analysis - Wetlands and Endangered Species

There are several wetlands resource areas on the site, as indicated by the MassDEP Wetlands Data Layer and the 2007 Veterans Park Renovation Master Plan. These include inland bank, bordering vegetated wetland (BVW), and isolated land subject to flooding (ILSF).

Wetlands resource area buffer zones and Riverfront Area. Exact delineation and character of wetlands resource areas was not available, so buffer zones are applied to all wetlands resource areas on the map, including those that do not have statutory buffer zones (e.g., ILSF). (Click on image to enlarge.)

Any activity to alter these features or land within their buffer zones (inland bank and BVW have buffer zones; ILSF does not) requires filing a Notice of Intent (NOI) with the Blackstone Conservation Commission in order to receive an Order of Conditions. The normal buffer zone for wetlands features is 100 ft., but the Blackstone Wetlands Bylaw increases this distance to 150 ft. for wetlands features within the "public water supply catchment basin" (Section 119-2).

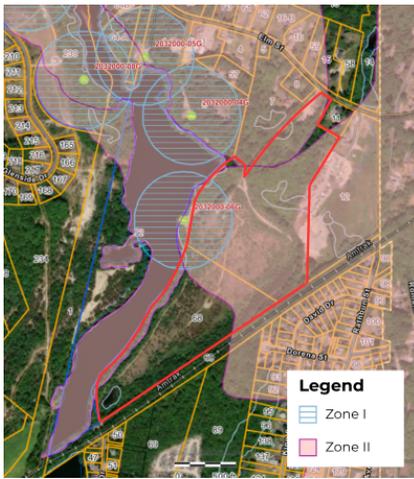
See the ["Environmental Analysis - Wetlands and Endangered Species"](#) section of the [Kimball Sands Properties](#) chapter for other wetlands permitting implications.

Because Mill River appears to convert to Harris Pond north and south of Veterans Park per the United States Geological Survey National Map, the site does not have a Riverfront Area. However, this should be further corroborated.

The site also does not feature any NHESP Priority Habitats or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.

Environmental Analysis - Wellhead and Surface Water Supply Protection

Existing Wellhead Protection Zones



Click on image to enlarge.

The Blackstone DPW has several public drinking water wells located near the Veterans Park site. The Zone I wellhead protection area of one of these wells extends into the Veterans Park site.

State drinking water regulations require that “current and/or future land uses within the Zone I are limited to those directly related to the provision of public drinking water or will have no significant adverse impact on water quality” (310 CMR 22.21(1)(b) (5)).

Water suppliers must also acquire ownership or control of sufficient land around wells to protect the water from contamination. "This requirement shall generally be deemed to have been met if all land within Zone I is under the ownership or control of the supplier of water." (310 CMR 22.21(3)(b)).

The Zone II wellhead zone for the nearby wells (i.e., the Blackstone Groundwater Protection District) covers most of the Veterans Park site. See the [Environmental Analysis - Wellhead Protection section of the Kimball Sands Properties chapter](#) for permitting and site design implications.

Future Expansion of Wellhead Protection Zones

CMRPC met with Superintendent of the Blackstone Department of Public Works (DPW) to discuss the Town's well infrastructure on and adjacent to Veterans Park. The DPW reported that the well closest to Veterans Park has lost capacity over time and is currently underperforming its permitted yield. To recover this lost capacity, the DPW is currently working on designing a well field that will extend further into Veterans Park. New wells associated with this well field will need to be protected by new Zone I wellhead protection areas. Depending on their location, the new wells could make redevelopment of the site into housing or active recreation impractical.

The new well field could be critical to the Town's ability to meet its water needs. The DPW reported that the Town currently can barely pump enough water to meet demand. This has led to the DPW operating some wells eighteen hours a day in the summer, which can harm the long-term integrity of the wells. Permanently changing the land use of parts of Veterans Park may also decrease the DPW's flexibility when it

comes to replacing or relocating wells in the future, due State groundwater regulations for wells.



Click on image to enlarge.

Harris Pond Surface Water Protection

Veterans Park borders Harris Pond to the west. Harris Pond is a supplementary water source for the City of Woonsocket, RI. However, Harris Pond is not classified as a Class A Drinking Water Source under 314 CMR 4.00, Massachusetts' regulations for surface water quality standards. Class A Drinking Water Sources come with restrictions on certain land uses in surrounding areas. Swimming and fishing are also prohibited in Class A Drinking Water Sources (310 CMR 22.20(B)(6)). Instead, Mill River is categorized as a Class B water source (314 CMR 4.06(6)(b)), meaning swimming and fishing is allowed.

Environmental Analysis - Other Permitting

Permits that may be required, depending on the scale of future development, include:

- Blackstone Land Disturbance Permit: "A permit must be obtained prior commencement of land-disturbing activity that may result in the disturbance of an area of 20,000 square feet or more" (Blackstone General Bylaws Section 110-6(A)). Compliance requires an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan.
- US EPA National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction General Permit: Applies when development disturbs one or more acres of land. Compliance requires a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) to minimize the amount of sediment and other pollutants associated with construction sites from being discharged in stormwater runoff.
- Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act

Environmental Analysis - Topography

The topography of Veterans Park is largely flat. The predominant topographical feature on the site is a berm that was constructed to prevent run-off from playing fields from flowing into the Zone I wellhead protection area on the site. Steep slopes are also present on the bank of Harris Pond.



Click on map and move arrow to shift map focus. Use the (+) and (-) buttons to zoom in and out, respectively.

Environmental Analysis - Article 97

"Article 97 of the Amendments to the Massachusetts Constitution (Art. 97) establishes a right to a clean environment including its natural, scenic, historical, and aesthetic qualities." [4] Article 97 land is land acquired / owned by a public entity (including municipalities) for open space, conservation, natural resources, or other related purposes. Since 1998, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) has had a "no net loss" approach to the disposition of Article 97 land [5]. This policy prescribes that a two-thirds vote of the state legislature and the provision of replacement land is required for public entities to dispose of Article 97 land. The policy was finally enshrined into law in 2022 as MGL Chapter 3 Section 5A.



Click on image to enlarge.

Blackstone acquired the Veterans Park site in 1997 [6]. The Blackstone Town Clerk's Office's certification of the 1997 Town Meeting vote indicates that the property was acquired for "general municipal purposes, including drinking water supply" [7]. "Drinking water supply" was also referenced in the minutes of the Town's February 2016 Special Town Meeting. This could mean that the lot qualifies as Article 97

land. In fact, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs [Article 97 Natural Resource Site Evaluation Viewer](#) identifies both property parcels that make up Veterans Park as "Open Space Protected with Article 97."

The Supreme Judicial Court has also found that a recorded deed restriction is not required for land to qualify under Article 97 [8]. A town's actions can also qualify land for protection under Article 97. In the case of Veterans Park, Blackstone has used the land for decades to safeguard its public water supply and previously used the site to host recreational sports fields.



2005 aerial imagery (left). 2023 aerial imagery (right). (Move the slider to shift between images.)

The Town voted in 2016 to change the use of the property from "public water supply" to "land held for the purpose of disposition, transfer or lease by the Board of Selectmen . . ." [9]. At the time, the Town was in negotiations to sell the property to Soldier On, a veterans housing provider. However, CMRPC could not locate any record of a vote in the state legislature around 2016 to approve of the sale of Veterans Park, despite it being EOEEA policy. This may have been because the sale of Veterans Park ultimately never came to fruition.

If Veterans Park is determined to qualify under Article 97, Blackstone would need to comply with the procedures outlined in MGL Chapter 3 Section 5A prior to any future sale of the site for private development. Legal counsel should advise on whether Article 97 applies to the site.

Infrastructure

Public water and sanitary sewer are present where Veterans Park borders Elm Street, according to maps on file with the Blackstone DPW.

See the ["Infrastructure" section of the Kimball Sands Properties chapter](#) for information on Blackstone's capacity to

support increased public water demand.

Reuse & Redevelopment

Reuse and redevelopment of Veterans Park should be contingent on the Town identifying clear priorities for the property. Alternative uses like housing development conflict with the expansion of well infrastructure on the site. Furthermore, the Town should make sure that it remains in compliance with State regulations concerning the ownership and control of Zone I wellhead protection areas. It could be possible to balance both these interests but not without consultation and mutual understanding between Town departments and boards.

Municipal Beach / Water Access

Because Harris Pond is categorized as a Class B water source, there is the possibility to create public water access to Harris Pond via Veterans Park. Options could include a municipal beach or kayak launch.

Any such alterations to the bank and buffer zone of Harris Pond would require an Order of Conditions from the Blackstone Conservation Commission and must comply with the Town's Wetlands Bylaw and the WPA (310 CMR 10.54). Public swimming access would also be subject to compliance with 105 CMR 445.000, which the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and local boards of health enforce.

It would also be responsible for the Town to consult with the City of Woonsocket, RI before pursuing recreational access to Harris Pond.

However, the slope of Veterans Park is steep in some areas, which may render access to Harris Pond from the site impractical.

Trails

The Town could create organized trails on site for use by the public. Many other communities have wilderness trails that are located in and around their Zone I and II wellhead protection zones. Before pursuing this option, the DPW should be consulted about any concerns to the safety of the Town's wells. Gates and fences could be installed to keep members of the public away from critical well infrastructure, if desired. A parking area would need to be created to support this use of the site.



Examples of hiking and wilderness trails located in and around public water wells in other communities. (Click on images to enlarge.)

Athletic Fields

Options and schematic plans for redeveloping the site as athletic fields are available in the 2007 Veterans Park Renovation Master Plan. Given the plan's age, it may require updating before implementation.

Redevelopment

The zoning of 22 Chestnut St. and the property's relative isolation from major transportation routes make residential development the most likely reuse option.

The accompanying conceptual site plan reflects a cottage housing community (i.e., small, single-family dwelling units clustered around common areas). The concept plan incorporates 71 single-story units at 1,500 sq. ft. each. The units' small size and one-story structures would make safer and more affordable options for seniors and first-time homebuyers.



This redevelopment concept would not be allowed under current zoning in the R-2 District, unless minimum lot size and other regulations were waived through the Subdivision process. A friendly MGL Chapter 40B development or a new overlay district offer other alternatives to realize something similar to the concept.

Factoring in two bedrooms for each unit, the development would be expected to generate 15,620 gallons per day of sewage flow at State sewage flow standards (310 CMR 15.203).

Additional water demand from the development would be 6,560 gallons per day, based on Blackstone's 2024 Residential Gallons per Capita Day (gallons / capita / day) figures and average household size data [10].



Concept is for demonstration purposes only and is not intended to comply with all applicable regulations. (Click on image to enlarge.)

[Site Plan \(PDF Version\)](#)

St. Theresa's Church



Click on image to enlarge.

Zoning

630 Rathbun Street or the former St. Theresa's Church is split zoned Commercial and R-1 (i.e., part of the parcel is zoned Commercial and part of the parcel is zoned R-1). The segment of the parcel that has frontage on Rathbun Street and Carter Avenue is zoned Commercial.

Permitted uses in the Commercial District include:

- Most commercial uses (e.g., restaurants, retail, offices; by right)
- Some industrial uses (by Special Permit)
- Municipal uses (by right)
- Outdoor recreational uses (by right)
- Single-family housing (by right)
- Two-family housing (by right)
- Multi-family housing (by Special Permit)

Blackstone's Zoning Bylaw prescribes that in cases of split zoning, "the regulations for any district in which the lot has frontage on a street may be extended not more than 30 feet into the other district" (Section 123-8(C)).



Click on image to enlarge.

Massachusetts courts have also established rules related to split-zoned lots [11]. One of these rules is that the primary use of the lot can only be built in the portion of the lot that permits that particular use. Therefore, if St. Theresa's was adapted to host a commercial use, the commercial use could only be placed within the segment of the parcel zoned

Commercial, plus 30 feet. Another rule is that the portion of

the lot where the primary use is not allowed may not be used “actively” in ways which would support or further the primary use. For example, parking for the commercial use described above could not be placed in the piece of the parcel zoned R-1 because retail uses are prohibited in that zone.

These circumstances make municipal reuse of the property an especially practical alternative. Municipal uses are allowed in both the Commercial and R-1 Zoning Districts, meaning that both zones could be utilized without the restriction described above.

Environmental Analysis

St. Theresa's Church is already developed, and the MassDEP Wetlands Data Layer does not indicate the presence of any wetlands resource areas on the lot. The site also does not feature any NHESP Priority Habitats or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.

Permits that may be required, depending on the scale of future development, include:

- Blackstone Land Disturbance Permit: “A permit must be obtained prior commencement of land-disturbing activity that may result in the disturbance of an area of 20,000 square feet or more” (Blackstone General Bylaws Section 110-6(A)). Compliance requires an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan.
- US EPA National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction General Permit: Applies when development disturbs one or more acres of land. Compliance requires a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) to minimize the amount of sediment and other pollutants associated with construction sites from being discharged in stormwater runoff.
- Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act

Infrastructure

St. Theresa's Church is serviced by public water and sanitary sewer, according to maps on file with the Blackstone DPW.

Reuse and Redevelopment

History

St. Theresa's Church closed on June 30, 2022, when the parish and St. Augustine Church in Millville merged with St. Paul Parish of Blackstone to form Divine Mercy Parish at St. Paul Church [\[12\]](#).

Previous analysis by the Town indicated that the buildings on the St. Theresa's campus have asbestos and were suspected to have lead-based paint. [13].

Case Studies

Buildings of religious significance provide unique possibilities for reuse due to their architecture, location, and history. The adaptive reuse of churches is becoming more common as a way to honor a site's heritage in the face of declining religious affiliation and service attendance. No two adaptive processes are the same; building typology and condition, stakeholders, the processes used, local regulations, and the financing of the project can all impact the possibilities of reuse.

Funding for church redevelopment can shape the possibilities of the space. The most common forms of redevelopment funding for religious sites include private/public partnerships, grant funding, and selling portions of land owned by religious authorities. Other considerations for adaptive reuse of churches and church property include the zoning of the site, historic preservation delays, tax exemption status, and use stipulations on consecrated land [14].

St. Theresa's presents a unique opportunity for the Town of Blackstone. The site contains two buildings, a front building which houses the church, classrooms, offices, and a dormitory, and a second building which contains offices, a community space, and a gym/auditorium.

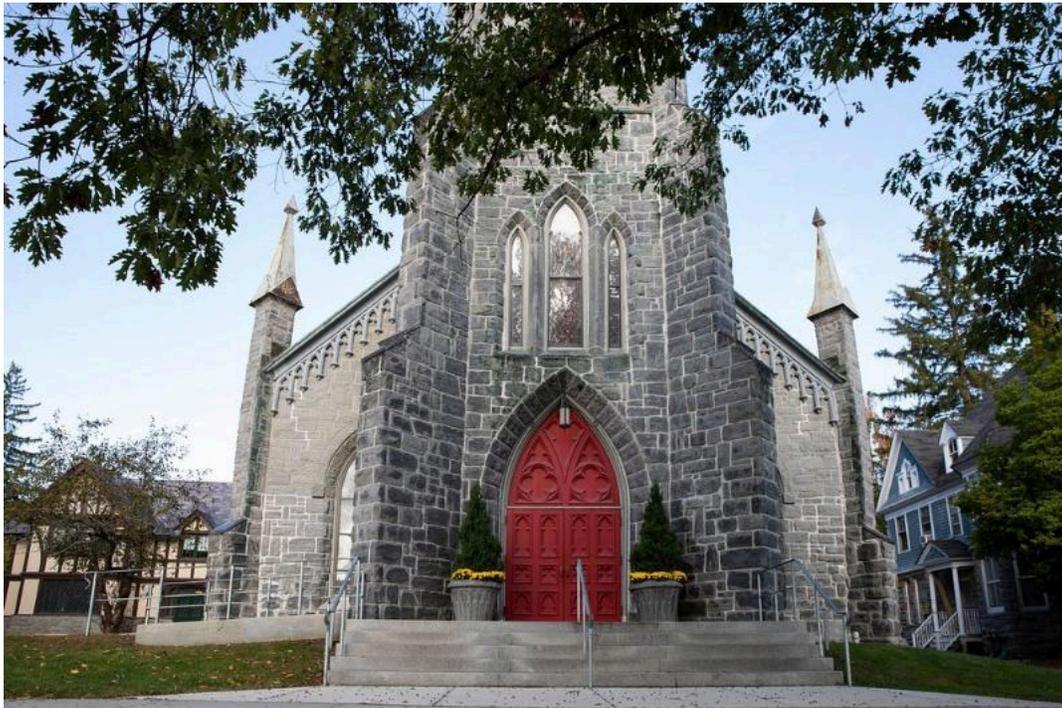
The case studies below illustrate the potential for these spaces.



Newton Centre Methodist Episcopal Church – Newton, MA

Built in the 19th century, the Newton Centre Methodist Episcopal Church was a central meeting place for the community and worshippers. After being bought by a group of developers and architects in the 1980s, the building was adapted into a modern office and commercial building [15]. The high ceilings of the structure allowed for the creation of several new floors, creating more space for leasing. The original exterior and neo-Romanesque architecture have been preserved, thus maintaining historical character while also allowing for economic growth and meeting the needs of the community. The building currently houses a restaurant, a bank, a bookstore, and a variety of offices.

(Scroll down to see next slide.)



St. James Place – Great Barrington, MA

St. James Place was built as an Episcopal Church in 1857 [16]. Constructed out of locally quarried limestone, the building is an example of 19th century Gothic Revival architecture in Western Massachusetts. In 2008, part of the building collapsed, resulting in the building being condemned. In 2010, the building was purchased by a local non-profit to be turned into a multi-use education and cultural center. After renovations, the building was re-opened in January 2017.



Gilbertville Stone Church – Hardwick, MA

The Trinitarian Congregational Church, now known as the Gilbertville Stone Church, was completed in 1874 [17]. The chapel was added in 1884, and the church is home to a historic Johnson and Son Organ. After many decades of use, the Trinitarian Church building was closed by the congregation in 2011. In 2015, the community group Friends of the Stone Church was founded as a public charitable corporation. Using an Emergency Funds grant from the Massachusetts Historic Commission, the Friends of the Stone Church were able to coordinate the preservation of the building and put it to new use as a local landmark and performance space. The church hosts a variety of musical performances and special events. Preservation efforts continue at the Gilbertville Stone Church with financial support from the Massachusetts Historic Commission, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund, and Preservation Massachusetts.

Park 'n Shop



Click on image to enlarge.

Zoning

2 Main St., also known as the former Park 'n Shop property, is zoned Commercial.

Permitted uses in the Commercial district include:

- Most commercial uses (e.g., restaurants, retail, offices; by right)
- Some industrial uses (by Special Permit)
- Municipal uses (by right)
- Outdoor recreational uses (by right)

- Single-family housing (by right)
- Two-family housing (by right)
- Multi-family housing (by Special Permit)

2 Main St. satisfies the minimum lot size and frontage requirements in the Commercial district:

Site / Zoning District	Lot Size (acres)	Lot Frontage (feet)
2 Main St. (actual)	4.87	~415
Commercial District (minimum)	0.34	100

The site is also within the Multi-Family Overlay District, which introduces additional rules for multi-family development.

Environmental Analysis

2 Main St. is already developed, and the MassDEP Wetlands Data Layer does not indicate the presence of any wetlands resource areas on the lot, except for Riverfront Area. Riverfront Area is the area spanning 200 ft. parallel of a river's annual high-water line (310 CMR 10.58(2)(3)), in this case, the Blackstone River. WPA performance criteria for redevelopment in previously developed riverfront areas include: 1) the proposed work improves existing conditions (310 CMR 10.58(5)(a)) and 2) the proposed work does not exceed the amount of already degraded area ((310 CMR 10.58(5)(c)). Some performance standards may be nullified if the applicant proposes restoration or mitigation.

The site also does not feature any NHESP Priority Habitats or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.

Permits that may be required, depending on the scale of future development, include:

- Blackstone Land Disturbance Permit: "A permit must be obtained prior commencement of land-disturbing activity that may result in the disturbance of an area of 20,000 square feet or more" (Blackstone General Bylaws Section 110-6(A)). Compliance requires an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan.

- US EPA National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction General Permit: Applies when development disturbs one or more acres of land. Compliance requires a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) to minimize the amount of sediment and other pollutants associated with construction sites from being discharged in stormwater runoff.
- Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act

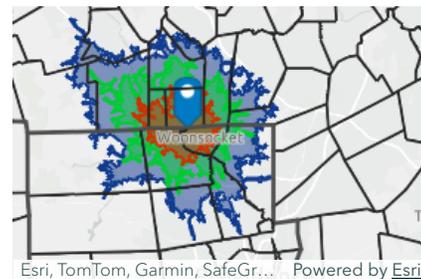
Infrastructure

2 Main St. is serviced by public water and sanitary sewer, according to maps on file with the Blackstone DPW.

Reuse & Redevelopment

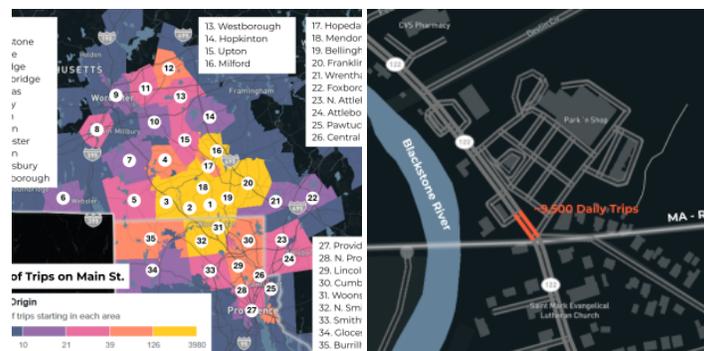
Location

2 Main Street is a shopping plaza located in the south of town near Blackstone's border with the City of Woonsocket, RI. The site is within a 10-minute driving distance of most parts of town [18]. Transportation corridors like Route 146 and Route 114 also place the site within a 20-minute driving distance of a regional population of more than 142,000 persons [19].



Drive Time Distances from 2 Main St. (Red = 10 min., Green = 15 min., Blue = 20 min.). (Click on arrows to expand image. Click on map and move arrow to shift map focus.)

Main Street at the Blackstone-Woonsocket border features moderate traffic, with about 9,500 daily trips generated from automobiles, commercial vehicles, and pedestrians [20]. Two-thirds of these trips originate outside Blackstone. Communities with 10+ trips range from Northborough to the north; Providence, RI to south; Dudley to the west; and Foxboro to the east. Approximately 40 percent of trips passing by the 2 Main Street Property are for the purpose of shopping, eating, running errands, and social or recreational activities.



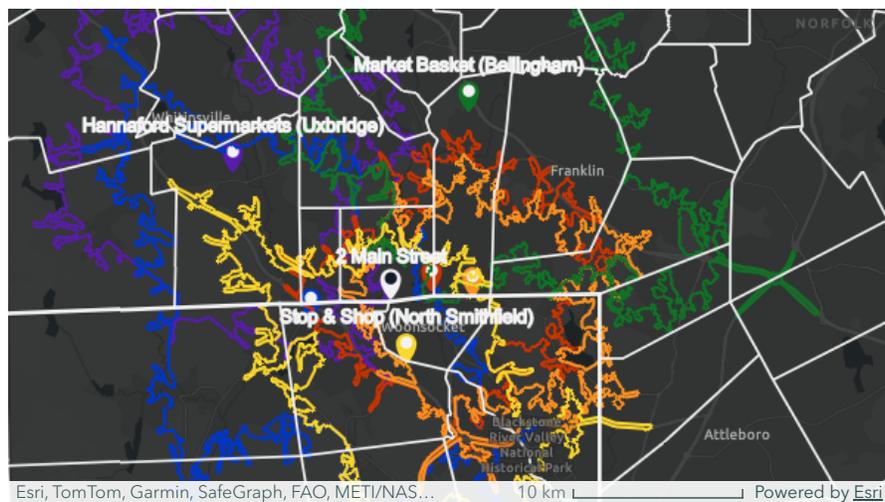
Click on images to enlarge.

Reuse - Grocery Store

Until 2021, the shopping plaza was anchored by a Park 'n Shop grocery store [21]. The roughly 21,000 sq. ft. space formerly occupied by the store remains vacant today.

Community feedback indicates that indicates that residents would like to see a new grocery store / supermarket in town.

However, the vacant storefront at 2 Main Street is too small to accommodate a major grocery chain. Chains like Stop & Shop prefer much larger building footprints. For reference, the Stop & Shop in Bellingham, MA is three times the size at over 60,000 sq. ft. Every part of Blackstone is also located within fifteen minutes driving distance of a major grocery chain outlet in a neighboring community, which would pose competition to any new grocers in Blackstone.



Closest major grocery stores within fifteen minutes driving distance of Blackstone. (Click on map and move arrow to shift map focus. Use the (+) and (-) buttons to zoom in and out, respectively.)

The remaining grocery stores with a 20-minute driving distance of 2 Main Street are nearly all small footprint locations that specialize in a food category, such as ethnic food or meat [22]. As currently configured, the former Park 'n Shop is too large to accommodate stores like this. But a store boasting a particular specialty or focus catered to the community, rather than generic grocery offerings, could be an option.

At 21,000 sq. ft., the former Park 'n Shop storefront is sized to accommodate a medium-sized grocery store. In correspondence with CMRPC, the [Market Report Blog](#) noted that the following midsized grocers are either expanding in the Northeast or may expand into the region in the future:

- ALDI
- Trader Joes
- Lidl
- Sprouts Farmers Market
- Food Bazaar
- Key Food
- Krasdale
- Allegiance
- Associated Supermarket Group
- America's Food Basket

There is one medium footprint grocery store within a 20-minute drive of 2 Main St., an ALDI in North Smithfield [23].

Reuse - Alternatives:

Replacement Junior Anchor: The size of the vacant Park ‘n Shop places it in the category of a junior anchor space. Junior anchors typically range from 15,000 – 30,000 sq. ft. Possible replacement uses include **retail** (such as T.J. Maxx, Home Goods, or Big Lots), **gyms** (such as Planet Fitness), or **entertainment and recreation**.

[Market Profile \(Click to See\)](#)

In recent years, **pickleball** has grown immensely in popularity. A case study involving the conversion of vacant commercial space to pickleball courts can be found in West Boylston, MA. There, Rt. 12 Pickle opened in February 2024 in a 30,000 sq. ft. vacant shopping plaza storefront [24]. This is consistent with a nationwide trend of turning underutilized retail space into pickleball courts [25]. According to the website [pickleheads](#), there are no pickleball courts located in Blackstone and few in neighboring communities. Nearby courts in Woonsocket, North Smithfield, Cumberland, and Franklin all appear to be outdoors.



Pictures of Rt. 12 Pickle in West Boylston, MA. (Click on images to enlarge.)

Mini golf represents another possibility. An example of an indoor mini golf course can be found at Trombetta's Farm in Marlborough, MA. Additionally, Puttshack opened a location at the Natick Mall in 2024 in a vacant 21,000 sq. ft. retail space [26]. The site features three 9-hole mini golf courses and dining and bar space. An 18-hole mini golf course typically requires between 18,000 and 22,000 sq. ft. of space but can be much smaller [27].



Photos of Trombetta's Farm (left) and a Puttshack facility (right). (Click on images to enlarge.)

Vacant retail spaces even have the potential to be transformed into **community recreation centers**. Anne Arundel County in Maryland is renovating a former grocery store into a recreation facility that will feature a gymnasium, multi-purpose courts, community meeting rooms, dance and fitness studios, an indoor playground, and more [28]. North Hampton, NH also turned a 4,000 sq. ft. vacant storefront in a large shopping plaza into a recreation center [29].

Split up the Building: The pool of tenants that need a space larger than 20,000 sq. ft. is limited, especially with the decline of brick-and-mortar retail in the face of competition from online sales [30]. Landlords can make space more appropriate for a wider tenant pool by **splitting up larger commercial spaces** into smaller ones. This can be done with new walls and by separating and upgrading utilities.

A number of retailers with average store sizes between 7,000 – 14,000 sq. ft. have been expanding, according to the real estate company Jones Lang LaSalle [31]. Examples include dollar, automotive parts, and hardware stores. The facilities of many sit-down restaurant chains range in size from 5,000 – 8,000 sq. ft. too.

Across the country, vacant drug stores, which typically span between 11,000 and 15,000 sq. ft., have been reinvented as multi-tenant storefronts. A former drug store in Flint, MI was redesigned with five new facades to host separate businesses [32].

Malls too are seeing a trend towards the division of large floor area spaces to accommodate more diverse businesses with smaller footprints [33].



Former pharmacy building in Flint, MI divided into smaller storefronts. (Move the slider to swipe between the 2015 [left] and 2025 [right] images).

Redevelopment: In recent years, the character of new shopping plazas has changed. The **blending of commercial and residential uses (i.e., mixed-use)** has replaced the commercial-only tenant makeups of old. New horizontal mixed-use developments in communities like Maynard, Sudbury, Lynnfield, and Woburn reflect this trend. Vertical mixed-use developments have also taken shape. In Framingham, a shuttered shopping plaza was redeveloped to host 10,000 sq. ft. of ground floor retail facing the street and 158 apartments above and/or behind the retail [34]. The lot size of this property is 4.85 acres, nearly identical in size to 2 Main St.



Conversion of shopping plaza (Nobscot Plaza; photos 1 & 2 from left) in Framingham to a vertical mixed-use development (Nobscot Village; photos 3 & 4). Location: 770 Water St., Framingham, MA 01701. (Click on images to enlarge).

However, several provisions in the Blackstone Zoning Bylaw preclude multi-family development at any significant scale.

The Blackstone Zoning Bylaw's Intensity of Use Schedule (Section 123-13) requires that each dwelling unit in excess of one requires 15 feet in additional frontage. This means that no more than about 22 dwelling units could be located on the lot (100 ft. minimum frontage [1 unit] + 315 excess ft. [21 units]).

The Multi-Family Overlay District also prescribes a formula for minimum lot area per dwelling unit (Section 123-23(C)(1)). In the Commercial Zoning District, this formula yields 7,500 sq. ft. per dwelling unit. Using this metric, only 28 two-bedroom dwelling units could be accommodated on 2 Main St.'s nearly five acres. This only amounts to 5.75 units per acre. For reference, the Massachusetts Smart Growth Model Bylaw recommends a density of at least 12 units per acre for two-and/or three-family residential uses and at least 20 units per acre for multi-family residential uses in town centers and mixed-use settings [35].

CMRPC has heard from developers that density is critical to the viability of new development projects in today's market. Therefore, the Town should consider amending the Multi-Family Overlay District or introducing a new overlay district,

to include 2 Main St., that covers parcels where multi-family development is viewed as a viable future use.

St. Paul St. Residential Lot



Click on image to enlarge.

Zoning

23 St. Paul Street is zoned R-1.

Permitted uses in the R-1 Zoning District include:

- Municipal uses (by right)
- Single-family dwellings (by right)
- Two-family dwellings (by right)
- Nursing, convalescent, or rest home (Special Permit)
- Flexible residential development (Special Permit)

The lot is also within the Town's Village Overlay District (VOD). The VOD outlines alternative dimensional requirements to the underlying R-1 District.

The lot, which comprises two property parcels, does not satisfy many of the minimum lot size requirements for both the R-1 District and the VOD. However, under MGL Chapter 40A Section 6 and Section 123-12(C) of the Blackstone Zoning Bylaw, it does meet the minimum size criteria to be considered a pre-existing nonconforming lot. Such lots receive protection from changes to minimum dimensional requirements if the lot was in existence prior to the implementation of the changes. Deeds show that the 23 St. Paul St. lot was in existence prior to the implementation of Blackstone's Zoning Bylaw in 1968 [36].

Site / Zoning District	Lot Size (sq. ft.)	Lot Frontage (feet)
St. Paul St. Vacant Lot (actual)	5,088	~90
R-1 District (minimum)	35,000	150
VOD (minimum)	7,500	70
MGL Chapter 40A Section 6 (minimum)	5,000	50

Reuse & Redevelopment

In 2014, police discovered the bodies of two deceased infants during a wellness check at 23 St. Paul St. [37]. The Town of Blackstone subsequently razed the structure on the site in 2018 [38]. Given this sensitive history, the Town requested that CMRPC explore ideas for a pocket park on the site.

Pocket Parks are unique due to their size, usually occupying less than one acre of land. Despite their small size, Pocket Parks can be an excellent way to turn underutilized land into community assets. The case studies below describe how municipalities have turned underutilized spaces into Pocket Parks, thus creating recreation space, remembering local histories, and memorializing tragic events. Funding for the creation of these spaces can come from a variety of sources, ranging from private donations to local government and nonprofit grants.



John and Frannie Herron Park – Worcester, MA

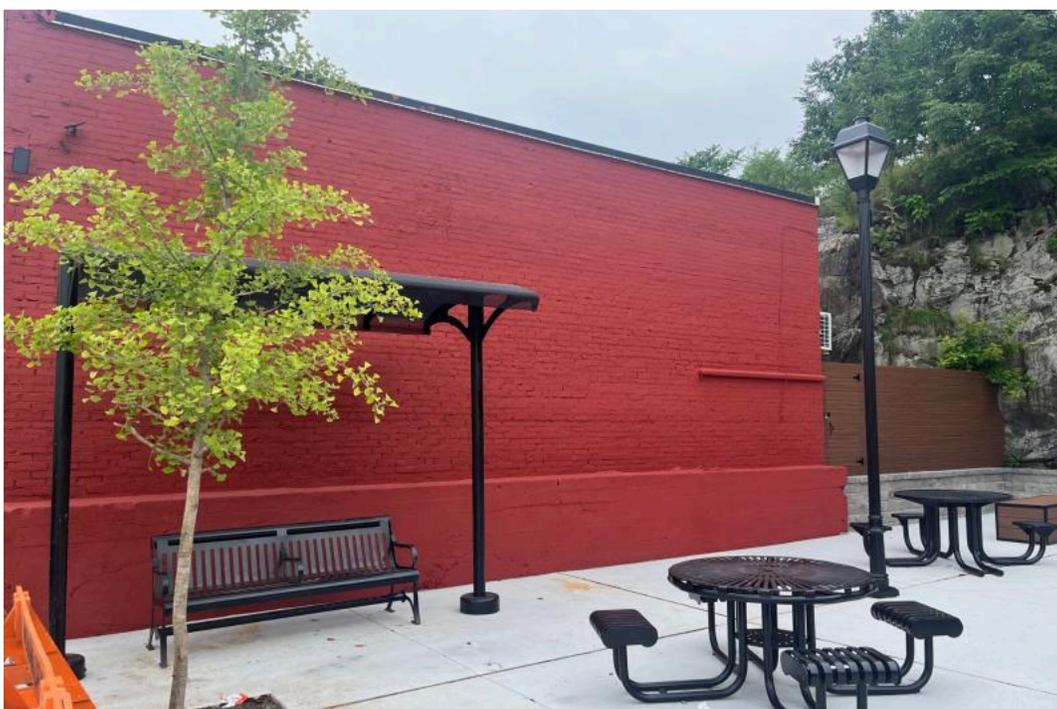
Established in 2009, John and Frannie Herron Park in Worcester, MA is a pocket park located in the Crown Hill neighborhood [39]. The park was designed to be a tribute to its namesakes and their impact on the city, particularly regarding historical preservation and gardening. The space was designed by a neighborhood resident and consists of several benches, a walkway, and a garden area. The park is cared for by the Crown Hill Neighborhood Association. Funding for the creation of this park came from the Nathaniel Wheeler Trust.

(Scroll down to see next slide.)



Frederick Douglass Park – Lynn, MA

Located in Lynn's arts district, the Frederick Douglass Park honors the culture and history of Lynn and pays tribute to Frederick Douglass, who resided in the city during the 1840s [40]. The park highlights Lynn's heritage through the "Stories of Lynn" mural, and contains a stage for local events, sitting areas, and a small green surrounded by gardens. The park is used to host a variety of events and was designed in partnership with Halvorson | Tighe and Bond Studio and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. The land was donated by the City of Lynn.



Woburn Pocket Park – Woburn, MA

Opened in 2023, the Woburn Pocket Park provides a space for recreation and outdoor activity in the center of Woburn [41]. The park provides new seating areas, tree cover, additional lighting, and green space with the backdrop of a natural rock wall. The project was sponsored by the Mayor's Office, the Planning Department, and the Department of Public Works. It was funded by the Woburn Redevelopment Authority and the State of Massachusetts.



Station Fire Memorial Park – Warwick, RI

The Station Fire Memorial Park honors the lives of victims of the Station nightclub fire that occurred in 2003 [42]. The park opened in 2017 and is located where the venue once stood. The park is designed with music in mind, with record-inspired individual memorials and a harp-inspired gateway. The park also features a grass lawn and gardens. The land was procured by the Station Fire Memorial Foundation. The Station Fire Memorial Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization, and funding for the memorial came from a variety of fundraising events and donations from both individuals and organizations.



Firefighter's Memorial – Worcester, MA

Unveiled to the public in 2008, the Firefighter's Memorial in Worcester, MA pays tribute to six fallen firefighters who responded to a fire at the Worcester Cold Storage and Warehouse Co. building [43]. The Memorial is located at the Franklin Street fire station in Worcester, and the tribute is constructed of three elements: a statue of a fire fighter figure reflecting on the tragedy, a pedestal holding a fireman's topcoat and helmet, and a 12-foot by 6-foot granite wall depicting the six fallen firefighters' spirits.

Main Street Corridor



Drone photos of Main Street in
Blackstone. (Click on images to enlarge).

Zoning

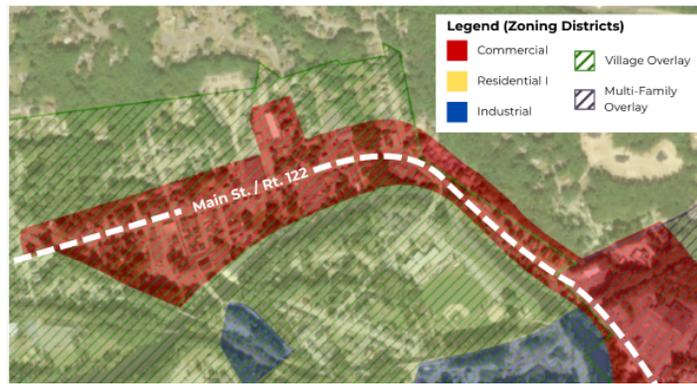
Main Street is zoned Commercial.

Permitted uses in the Commercial district include:

- Most commercial uses (e.g., restaurants, retail, offices; by right)
- Some industrial uses (by Special Permit)
- Municipal uses (by right)
- Outdoor recreational uses (by right)
- Single-family housing (by right)
- Two-family housing (by right)
- Multi-family housing (by Special Permit)

The Town should implement the recommendations of the 2018 Town Center Mixed-Use Zoning Analysis concerning permitted uses (recommended edit #2). Currently, uses incompatible with the character of the downtown appear to be allowed by right, such as outdoor recreation. Blackstone should also consider adding single-family homes to the list of prohibited uses in the Commercial District. This measure would help ensure that the downtown's limited commercial real estate is not absorbed by low-density residential uses. Existing single-family homes would still have grandfather status under MGL Chapter 40A Section 6 and Section 123-12(C) of the Blackstone Zoning Bylaw.

The intensity of use requirements for the Commercial district are not consistent with the existing character of downtown Blackstone. Nearly three-fourths of property parcels are smaller than the minimum required lot size^[44]. Many properties also features non-compliant setbacks, particularly front yard setbacks. The Commercial district requires a 20-foot front yard setback, but existing structures typically sit much closer to sidewalk. These properties are likely what are known as “pre-existing nonconforming properties.” Changes or alterations to these properties must follow the process outlined in MGL Chapter 40A Section 6 and Section 123-10 of the Blackstone Zoning Bylaw. For commercial properties, this always involves Special Permit approval and depending on the change, a variance.



Click on image to enlarge.

However, Main Street is also covered by the Village Overlay District (VOD). The VOD outlines alternative dimensional requirements to the underlying Commercial district. These alternative standards facilitate compact development and street enclosure, preserving the charming character of downtown Blackstone. However, this comes with the qualifier that the Planning Board must grant a Special Permit for “village compatible development.”

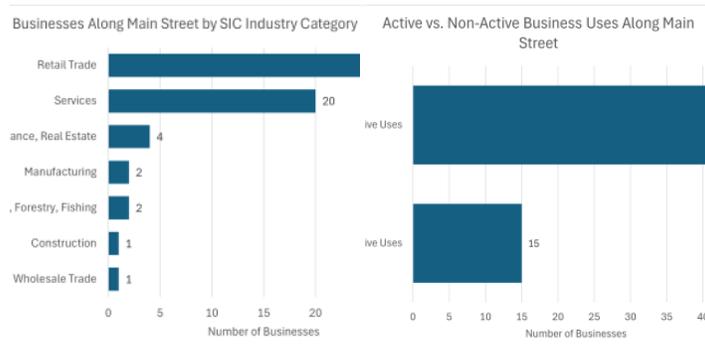
Therefore, in effect, most new development in downtown Blackstone appears to require a Special Permit.

The Town should consider removing the requirement that the Planning Board grant a Special Permit to allow for the use of alternative dimensional requirements under the VOD.

Blackstone should also implement recommended edit #3 from the 2018 Town Center Mixed-Use Zoning Analysis, which edits the dimensional requirements in the VOD. A possible change to recommended edit #2 would be to introduce a maximum front yard standard of only ten feet in the Commercial portion of the district. One of downtown Blackstone’s greatest strengths is the relative continuity of its street wall. Front yard setbacks should reinforce this strength.

Business Makeup

The Main Street corridor in Downtown Blackstone is home to around a third of the town’s businesses, including many of the retail trade and service establishments [45]. Most of the businesses along Main Street are “active uses.” In this context, active uses mean public or semi-public uses that encourage pedestrian activity along the front of a building and utilization of a building during substantial portions of the day on most days [46]. Examples of active use include retail and restaurants. Examples of non-active uses include offices and housing.



Click on images to enlarge.

Active uses are critical to the economic prosperity of business districts. When active uses are clustered together, there are more attractions to encourage consumers to visit. Businesses are also more likely to benefit from complementary effects (i.e., spontaneous exposure to consumers frequenting neighboring establishments).

There is a wide diversity of active uses in downtown Blackstone. The most numerous active uses are Miscellaneous Retail, Personal Services, Eating and Drinking Places, and Food Stores.



Click on image to enlarge chart.

Miscellaneous retail is composed of a collection of cannabis, liquor, and smoke stores and a pharmacy. The corridor could benefit from other forms of boutique or niche retail to complement these stores.

At least half of Eating and Drinking Places also appear to be limited-service models. The corridor could benefit from more full-service restaurant offerings.

These observations are supported by community survey feedback.

Finally, most food stores fit the description of convenience stores. There may be a niche for new food stores that

specialize in a particular food category or ethnic cuisine.

Streetscape

The streetscape of the Main Street corridor represents a significant strength. To begin with, Main Street features wide sidewalks that offer great comfort and connectivity to pedestrians. Second, building facades along the corridor hug the sidewalk, creating a feeling of street enclosure. This enhances visual interest for pedestrians and contributes to traffic calming.



[Click on image to enlarge.](#)

However, Main Street could benefit from improvements in several key areas.

Crosswalks: Certain segments of Main Street feature large gaps without crosswalks from one side of the street to the other. Additional crosswalks should be installed to close these gaps.

Amenities: There are no amenities along Main Street, such as benches or human scale lighting fixtures.

Green Infrastructure: There are few trees and other plantings along the Main Street corridor. Occasional curb bump outs could be installed to provide additional needed space for street trees.



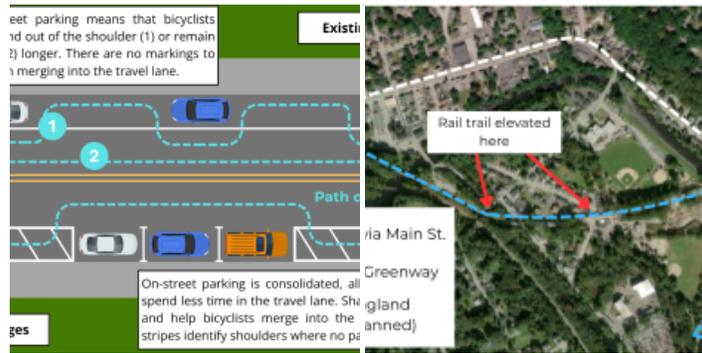
Distances between crosswalks on Main Street (left) and street tree foliage comparison between Blackstone and Southbridge (right). (Click on images to enlarge).

Wayfinding: There is no wayfinding signage at the Blackstone-Woonsocket border nor where the Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT; planned trail) and the Blackstone River Greenway respectively intersect Main Street.

Road Cross Section: West of Blackstone Street, Main Street / Route 122 features wide shoulders. However, there are currently no markings or signs indicating the intended use of the shoulders. At present, the shoulders are used by a small number of vehicles for on-street parking. Main Street is a MassDOT jurisdiction road, and in previous correspondence with CMRPC, MassDOT District 3 has indicated that it has not permitted on-street parking on any segments of State Highway in the District. Therefore, the existing practice of on-street parking on Main Street appears to not be sanctioned. The Town should consult with MassDOT about formalizing this parking.

But on-street parking may pose conflicts with bicycles also attempting to use the shoulder. The Town should engage with MassDOT about the feasibility of marking sections of the shoulder as parking bays. The parking bays could be complemented with sharrows (i.e., shared lane markings), indicating to drivers that bicycles may merge from the road shoulder into the driving lane at these locations. Enhancing the experience of bicyclists on Main Street is important, as it currently offers the most direct route to link the SNETT and the Blackstone Greenway.

Another possibility is installing bike lanes in the road shoulders.



Potential streetscape changes (left) and rail trail routes in downtown Blackstone (right). (Click on images to enlarge).

Auto Salvage Yard



Click on images to enlarge.

Zoning

22 Chestnut St. is zoned R-3.

Permitted uses in the R-3 district include:

- Municipal uses (by right)
- Single-family dwellings (by right)
- Two-family dwellings (by right)
- Nursing, convalescent, or rest home (Special permit)
- Flexible residential development (Special permit)

22 Chestnut St. was historically an auto salvage yard.

"Junkyards, secondhand auto parts" are permitted in the R3 district by Special Permit approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

22 Chestnut St. satisfies the minimum lot size and frontage requirements for the R3 District.

Site / Zoning District	Lot Size (acres)	Lot Frontage (feet)
22 Chestnut St. (actual)	7.55	511
R-3 Zoning District (minimum)	2.75	275

The large minimum lot size of the R3 zoning district means that the 22 Chestnut St. property could only accommodate two lots if the property were conventionally subdivided.

Blackstone should consider reducing the minimum lot size in the R3 district. Already, nearly three-fourths of lots in the R3 district are undersized, meaning the 120,000 sq. ft. minimum lot size requirement is not reflective of existing conditions on the ground [47].

Environmental Analysis - General

The MassDEP Wetlands Data Layer does not indicate the presence of any wetlands resource areas on the site. Wetlands resource areas were also not noted in records on file with MassDEP for the site's MGL Chapter 21E Release Tracking Numbers (see RTN 2-0012263 & RTN 2-0000483).

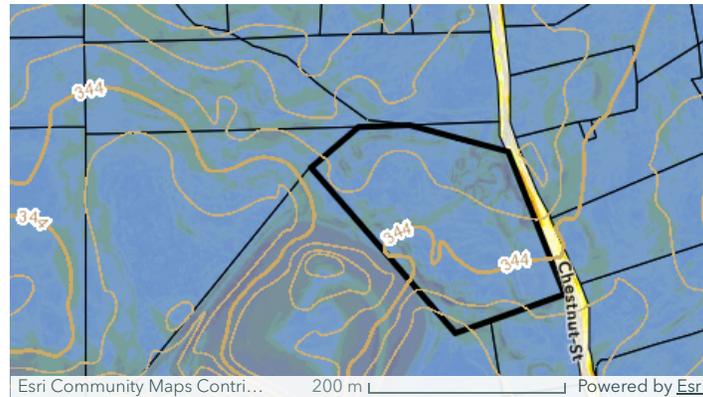
The site also does not feature any NHESP Priority Habitats or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The western border of the property is identified as critical natural landscape by MassWildlife's BioMap, but this does not carry any regulatory implications.

Permits that may be required, depending on the scale of future development, include:

- Blackstone Land Disturbance Permit: “A permit must be obtained prior commencement of land-disturbing activity that may result in the disturbance of an area of 20,000 square feet or more” (Blackstone General Bylaws Section 110-6(A)). Compliance requires an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan.
- US EPA National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction General Permit: Applies when development disturbs one or more acres of land. Compliance requires a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) to minimize the amount of sediment and other pollutants associated with construction sites from being discharged in stormwater runoff.
- Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act

Environmental Analysis - Topography

The topography of 22 Chestnut St. is gently sloping. Steep slopes located in the northeast corner of the property appear to be from debris remains leftover from the site's history as an auto salvage yard.



Click on map and move arrow to shift map focus. Use the (+) and (-) buttons to zoom in and out, respectively.

Environmental Analysis - Brownfields

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, "A brownfield is a property where expansion, redevelopment or reuse may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant or contaminant."

In Massachusetts, brownfields fall under the jurisdiction of MGL Chapter 21E. This chapter encompasses "issues related to the identification and cleanup of property contaminated by releases of oil and/or hazardous material to the environment" [48]. The Massachusetts Contingency Plan (MCP; 310 CMR 40.0000) lays out a detailed process on when and how contaminated sites must be assessed and cleaned up.

A release of oil and hazardous materials was first reported on the site in 1989 (RTN 2-0000483) [49]. A second release was attributed in 1998 (RTN 2-0012263). Both releases were classified as Tier 1D in 1996, meaning they were in noncompliance with MGL Chapter 21E and the MCP.

Environmental site assessments by Licensed Site Professionals (LSPs) and site visits by MassDEP through the late 1980s to the early 2000s found surface soil contamination and subsurface contamination of groundwater.

Levels of MTBE above state drinking water thresholds were found in the groundwater of the site and some adjacent residential properties. MassDEP installed filters on the wells of two residences in the late 1990s, but the MTBE level for one

residence had returned to acceptable levels as of 2008 and was continuing to steadily drop.

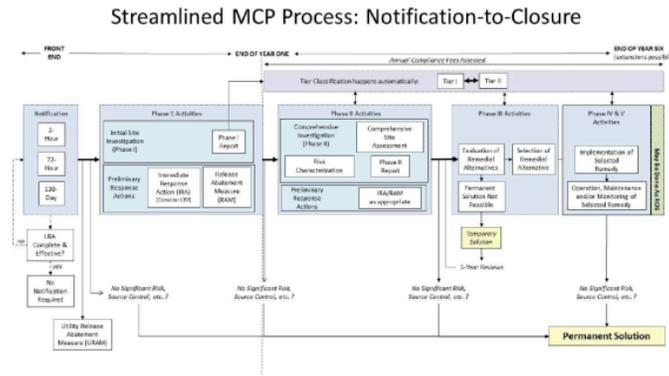
Aerial imagery shows that around 2005, the volume of automobile wrecks on the site began to steadily decrease. As of 2019, there were no cars visible. However, Blackstone's Health Agent reported that a few vehicles remained when they visited the site in 2022, along with refuse and debris around the property and car parts within the structure. Someone was also living in a trailer on the site at the time.



Aerial imagery of 22 Chestnut St. 2005 (left) and 2019 (right). (Move the slider to shift between images.)

Addressing the contamination and noncompliance of the site will require at least Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs), plus any necessary cleanup actions. Under the MCP, Phase I ESA reports are called Initial Site Investigations and Phase II ESA reports are called Comprehensive Site Assessments. Phase I ESAs are only valid for six months from the date of the final report. After this, they must be updated (if less than a year has passed) or conducted again (if over a year has passed).

If the results of the Phase II ESA merit cleanup actions, a Remedial Action Plan (RAP) could help evaluate cleanup alternatives based on site-specific conditions, effectiveness, feasibility, and cost.



Flow Chart of the Massachusetts Contingency Plan (MCP) process for addressing contaminated sites. (Click on image to enlarge.)

The Waste Site Cleanup Section at MassDEP's Central Massachusetts Office is aware of the property and its noncompliant status. The Section reported the primary responsible party (PRP) for the property has passed away. The Secretary of the Commonwealth's corporation database also lists the owner of the property, COUNTRYSIDE AUTO SALVAGE, INC., as dissolved by court order or the State in 2019. As a result, permission to access to the site currently poses an obstacle.

Infrastructure

Chestnut St. is not serviced by water or sewer infrastructure. According to maps on file with the Blackstone DPW, the closest water main is located on Milk St. approximately where it intersects with Chestnut St.

Correspondence on file with MassDEP for the site's 21E RTN 2-0000483 reveals that residents on Chestnut St. have inquired about expanding the Town's water main in the past, but the Town has responded that there is not sufficient development density on Chestnut St. to justify the cost.

See the ["Infrastructure" section of the Kimball Sands Properties chapter](#) for information on Blackstone's capacity to support increased public water demand.

Reuse & Redevelopment

The zoning of 22 Chestnut St. and the property's relative isolation from major transportation routes makes commercial uses such as retail, restaurants, or even warehousing unlikely. Commercial uses that are less location dependent, such as long-term storage, or that require isolation, such as cannabis cultivation or compost facilities, offer possibilities. However, a variance or overlay district would be necessary to facilitate such uses.

Residential development may be the more likely reuse option, depending on limitations imposed by environmental contamination. Remediation standards for residential reuse of brownfield properties are higher than those for non-residential reuse. The Remedial Action Plan could evaluate which approach is the most feasible factoring in site conditions and cost.

The site's proximity to Blackstone's former landfill could detract from its residential appeal. According to MassDEP records, the closed landfill at 14 Chestnut St. is capped but not lined [50]. There are case studies of new residential developments being built next to decommissioned landfills in other communities. For example, an apartment complex in Wayland, MA completed in 2022, Alta Oxbow, was built right next to the neighboring Town of Sudbury's decommissioned landfill [51]. But the landfill in this instance is capped and lined [52].

The accompanying conceptual site plan reflects a cottage housing community (i.e., small, single-family dwelling units clustered around common areas). The concept plan incorporates 46 single-story units at 1,400 sq. ft. each. The units' small size and one-story structures would make safer and more affordable options for seniors and first-time homebuyers.



Each building represents two attached units (1,400 sq. ft. each). Concept is for demonstration purposes only and is not intended to comply with all applicable regulations. (Click on image to enlarge.)



Sample photo of a cottage housing dwelling unit. (Click on image to enlarge.)

This redevelopment concept would not be allowed under current zoning in the R-3 District, unless minimum lot size and other regulations were waived through the Subdivision process. A friendly MGL Chapter 40B development or a new overlay district offer other alternatives to realize something similar to the concept.

Factoring in two bedrooms for each unit, the development would be expected to generate 10,120 gallons per day of sewage flow at State sewage flow standards (310 CMR 15.203). The site does not currently have access to public sewer. Because sewage flow exceeds 10,000 gallons per day, the development could require a Groundwater Discharge Permit from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (310 CMR 15.006) if a common septic system was used to service all units.

Additional water demand from the development would be 4,250 gallons per day, based on Blackstone's 2024 Residential Gallons per Capita Day (gallons / capita / day) figures and average household size data [53].

The site is not equipped with public water. The public water main would need to be extended to reach the site, or the site would have to rely on well water. Because the development would entail more than 15 service connections / serve more than 25 persons year-round, the well would be considered a Public Water System, specifically a Community Water System. The Source Approval process for public groundwater sources is laid out in 310 CMR 22.21.

Public Water Systems require a Zone I wellhead protection area. Under yields of 10,000 gallons per day, the size of the Zone I wellhead protection area is determined by a formula outlined in the Zone I definition in 310 CMR 22.02. A Zone I was not incorporated into the above concept site plan.

Public Water Systems also must comply with certified operator staffing requirements (310 CMR 22.11B). Water suppliers may contract out these services.

Finally, no septic systems may be constructed within the Zone I of a public water supply well (310 CMR 15.211).

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