

PAXTON, MASSACHUSETTS 2008 COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN

CHAPTER 5

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



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Paxton's Labor Force

The number of employed Paxton residents has remained relatively unchanged over the past decade (as has the Town's population), with very minimal fluctuation from year to year. Since 1996, Paxton's unemployment rate has been lower than the County and State rates of unemployment. This indicates that the workforce in Paxton has a fair amount of marketability and job security. This is likely due to the high level of education that is discussed in the Housing Chapter.

Table ED-1 below presents the number of employed/unemployed Paxton residents for the last decade. The unemployment rate is based on estimates of people who consider themselves part of the workforce are 16 years of age or older and are currently looking for employment, regardless of whether or not they have had a job in the past. The table also allows for comparison of the Town's unemployment rate with the State's overall rate for the same period of time.

Table ED-1 - Employment Status of Paxton Residents 1996-2006

Year	Total Residents in Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Rate of Unemployment	State Rate of Unemployment
1996	2,246	2,181	65	2.9	4.6
1997	2,290	2,239	51	2.2	4.1
1998	2,437	2,385	52	2.1	3.4
1999	2,438	2,393	45	1.8	3.3
2000	2,338	2,289	49	2.1	2.7
2001	2,360	2,294	66	2.8	3.7
2002	2,361	2,279	82	3.5	5.3
2003	2,378	2,280	98	4.1	5.8
2004	2,358	2,277	81	3.4	5.2
2005	2,371	2,278	93	3.9	4.8
2006	2,399	2,297	102	4.3	5.0

Source: Massachusetts Division of Unemployment Assistance

Where Paxton Residents Work

The US Census Bureau compiles workplace origin/destination statistics as part of the decennial census of population. A break down of where Paxton residents work is presented in Table ED-2.

Table ED-2 - Workforce Place of Employment for Paxton Residents 2000

Place	Number of People	% of Workforce
Worcester	1,006	46.3%
Paxton	313	14.4%
Holden	85	3.9%
Spencer	74	3.4%
Auburn	52	2.4%
Marlboro	42	1.9%
Fitchburg	41	1.9%
Millbury	37	1.7%
Shrewsbury	32	1.5%
Gardner	28	1.3%
Southbridge	27	1.2%
Other	436	20.1%
Total	2,173	100%

Source: 2000 US Census

The table above shows that 46% of Paxton's workforce commuted to Worcester in 2000, while only 14% of the employed residents stayed in Town to work. This number is not surprising considering that Worcester serves as the Region's commerce center. Conversely, 267 Worcester residents (or 0.3% of the employed residents) traveled to Paxton for their employment.

Commuting Time

According to the US Census Bureau, the mean travel time to work for Paxton's labor force has increased steadily over the past 25 years, starting at 19.4 minutes in 1980 and rising to 24.0 minutes in 2000, an increase of 24%. Increased travel times to work have been a trend across the State and nation as a whole during the past 25 years. It should be noted that the 2000 US Census reported that 64 Paxton residents walk to work and another 10 used public transportation to get to their jobs.

The Number and Types of Jobs in Paxton

The Massachusetts Division of Unemployment Assistance is the State entity in charge of tracking the changes taking place in the various sectors of the State's economy at both the state and local levels. Table ED-3 presents the changes that took place in Paxton's local economy over the past five years.

The following statements should be kept in mind when examining the data in Table ED-3

An establishment is defined as the physical location of a certain economic activity. A single establishment generally produces a single good or provides a single service. An enterprise (a private firm, government, or nonprofit organization) can consist of a single establishment or

multiple establishments. All establishments in an enterprise may be classified in one industry (e.g., a chain), or they may be classified in different industries (e.g., a conglomerate).

The number of workers is based on how many people are eligible for unemployment insurance at each establishment. One is eligible for unemployment insurance if they earn more than one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500) per quarter.

The number of business establishments that are operating in Paxton has fluctuated over the past five years on record, ranging from a high of 81 establishments in 2005 to a low of 69 establishments in 2003. It should be noted that Paxton had more business establishments in 2005 (81) than in 2001 (76) but there were 16 fewer people employed at these establishments. The smaller mean staff per business may be an indication of newer businesses that have not established the need for a higher number of staff or it may be a product of the industry sector to which the businesses belong. Specifically, the business service industry has the highest number of establishments in Paxton and the staff requirements for tasks such as information technology and other associated services are minimal.

Table ED-3 - Employment and Wages in Paxton 2001-2005

Year	Total Annual Pay-roll	Ave. Weekly Pay-roll	# of Establishments	# of Workers	Bus. Service Jobs	Social & Health Serv.	Construction Jobs	Whole/Retail Trade Jobs	Other Service Jobs
2001	\$22 mill.	\$600	76	707	149	21	35	28	42
2002	\$20 mill.	\$592	73	650	79	22	39	29	42
2003	\$19 mill.	\$636	69	586	72	19	45	36	37
2004	\$20 mill.	\$632	72	633	99	21	45	50	39
2005	\$22 mill.	\$607	81	691	109	24	52	67	45

Source: Massachusetts Division of Unemployment Assistance

In-Town Job Projections

CMRPC's Regional Traffic Demand Forecast Model allows for the projection of jobs per community based on modeled traffic patterns. CMRPC projected 680 in-town jobs for 2005; however the Division of Unemployment Assistance counted 691 in-town jobs in 2005. Thus, the actual number of jobs in Paxton is growing faster than the CMRPC projections. Currently, CMRPC is projecting a continued steady growth of in-town jobs between now and 2030. CMRPC projects there will be 730* in-town jobs by 2010, 790* in-town jobs by 2020 and 830* in-town jobs by 2030. Paxton will need a coordinated economic development strategy with appropriate zoning to properly guide the growth of the establishments that may create the increase of in-town jobs.

*The employment for 2005, 2010, 2020 and 2030 was projected based upon the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) annual summary of employment for each municipality through 2004, Executive Office of Transportation – Office of Transportation Planning (EOT-OTP) regional projections, and the trend of historical employment sector changes.

Paxton's Largest Employers

Paxton's largest employers include:

- *Anna Maria College*: Located at 50 Sunset Drive, this institution of higher learning employs roughly 300 people (faculty/staff/administration), by far Paxton's largest employer.
- *The Town of Paxton*: The Town employs 68 people (both full and part-time) and additionally, there are approximately 30 call firefighters/EMT's who are technically employed by the Town but do not collect a paycheck on a regular basis.
- *The Wachusett Regional School System*: The Paxton Center School located at 19 West Street is operated by the Regional School District and currently employs roughly 70 people.
- *Clear Channel Worcester*: Located at 96 Stereo Lane, the radio stations (WSRS/WTAG) employ roughly 35 people
- *Paxton Sports Center*: Located at 679 Pleasant Street, the athletic and tennis club employs roughly 15 people.
- *Dunkin Donuts*: Located at 607 Pleasant Street, this food service establishment employs 12 people (mostly part-time) at this time.
- *Conte Insurance*: Located at 579 Pleasant Street, this insurance broker employs 10 people.
- *Pampered Pet*: Located at 711 Pleasant Street, this retailer employs 9 people.
- *Paxton Animal Hospital*: Located at 612 Pleasant Street, this veterinary care center employs 7 people.
- *Barre Savings Bank*: Located at 713 Pleasant Street, the bank employs 6 people at this time.
- *Country Bank*: Located at 687 Pleasant Street, the bank employs 6 people at this time.



Economic Sector's Contribution to the Local Tax Base

In fiscal year 2007, Paxton levied a total of \$6,609,301 in taxes, based on a local tax rate of \$11.42 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. Paxton homeowners accounted for 96.1% of the total 2007 tax base (\$6,349,869), while businesses and industry accounted for approximately 3.2% of the tax base (\$214,448). The remainder (0.7%) was derived from taxes on personal property (\$44,944). The next two tables examine how Paxton compares to its adjacent neighbors in terms of the commercial and industrial tax base.

Table ED-4 - Commercial Tax Base Comparison FY2007

Community	Tax Rate	Commercial Taxes Levied	Assessed Valuation	% of Total Tax Levy
Paxton	\$11.42	\$168,095	\$14,719,350	2.5%
Rutland	\$10.76	\$168,150	\$15,627,357	2.0%
Worcester	\$25.32	\$37,516,578	\$1,481,697,400	20.6%
Leicester	\$9.31	\$412,594	\$44,317,328	4.1%
Spencer	\$7.73	\$543,538	\$70,315,446	6.1%
Holden	\$11.56	\$757,420	\$65,520,800	3.2%
Oakham	\$8.40	\$51,513	\$6,132,466	2.9%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue

The previous table indicates that Paxton raises the second lowest (above only Oakham) dollar amount of taxes from its commercial sector and has the second lowest commercial assessed value (above only Oakham) when compared to its neighbors. The taxes levied against Paxton's commercial base are considerably smaller than all of its immediate neighbors with the exception of Rutland and Oakham.

Table ED-5 - Industrial Tax Base Comparison FY2007

Community	Tax Rate	Industrial Taxes Levied	Assessed Valuation	% of Total Tax Levy
Paxton	\$11.42	\$46,393	\$4,062,400	0.7%
Rutland	\$10.76	\$39,090	\$3,632,900	0.5%
Worcester	\$25.32	\$10,950,292	\$432,476,000	6.0%
Leicester	\$9.31	\$181,766	\$19,523,784	1.8%
Spencer	\$7.73	\$274,148	\$35,465,400	3.1%
Holden	\$11.56	\$325,113	\$28,124,000	1.4%
Oakham	\$8.40	\$9,463	\$3,732,464	1.8%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue

The previous table indicates that Paxton has no real industrial contribution to the tax base. It should be noted that the small amount (0.7%) of tax levy attributed to industry is in fact the land on which several radio towers are located at the top of Asnebumskit Hill. Paxton's neighbors Worcester and Spencer have the largest industrial contribution to their tax base (6.0% and 3.1% respectively). This is not unexpected seeing that Worcester is the Region's economic center and Spencer is a much more urban community with rail access and convenient access to the interstate highway system.

The contribution of the economic sector in Paxton has remained essentially unchanged in the past 15 years. In 1990, Paxton's economic sector accounted for 3.4% of the total tax base, while in 2007 the economic sector's contribution to the total tax base was 3.3%. Although there has been virtually no growth the local economy has maintained its position in the face of rapid residential growth. As long as the economic sector and the tax dollars it generates continue to account for only a small percentage of the Town's total levy residential taxes will continue to

account for nearly all of the Town's tax base. To avoid any shrinkage of the local economy and certainly to expand it Paxton will need a comprehensive economic development strategy.

Regional Economic Trends

There have been two recent economic development profiles prepared for Central Massachusetts. The first was prepared in 2004 by the Center for Economic Development, UMass – Amherst, which evaluated the employment characteristics of 2,486 companies in Central Massachusetts. The second was prepared in March 2007 by the Massachusetts Department of Workforce Development, which evaluated 14,514 companies in Central Massachusetts; a much larger sample than the UMass study. The key findings of both studies are outlined below.



UMass 2004 Study:

- Approximately 77% of all companies in the Central Massachusetts region employ fewer than 50 people. At the opposite end of the spectrum, only 4% of the companies employ more than 500 people.
- Just over half (51%) of the companies surveyed reported sales volumes between \$1 million and \$5 million, with another 17% reporting sales volumes between \$5 million and \$10 million.
- Of the companies surveyed, 46% were service-oriented, 15% were manufacturing operations and 10% were of the finance/insurance/real estate category.
- Almost half (47%) of the new companies established during the last five years fall within the service sector.

Department of Workforce Development 2007 Regional Study:

- Just over half (52%) of all Central Massachusetts unemployment claimants in 2006 came from the four largest economic sectors: production (14%), construction (14%) office and administrative support services (14%) and sales (10%).
- Slow labor force growth continues to characterize both Massachusetts and the Central Massachusetts region. During 2006 the State's labor force increased by 1.5% and the Central Massachusetts labor force increased by 1.3% (3,642 potential employees). Additionally the number of employed persons in both Massachusetts (31,093 or +1.2% bringing the number of employed persons to 3,257,766) and the Central Massachusetts Region (2,432 or +0.9% bringing the number of employed persons to 275,851) increased over the same time period.

- Small employers dominate the Central Massachusetts workforce. Among the 14,514 establishments surveyed, approximately 86% had fewer than 20 employees (remember: this is based on a much larger sample size than the 2004 UMass study). These firms, however, accounted for just 23% (55,026) of the total number of jobs (241,045) in Central Massachusetts.
- By contrast, there were 40 establishments (or roughly 3% of all establishments) that reported having at least 100 employees. These firms were responsible for almost half (119,306) of all jobs in Central Massachusetts.
- For 2006, the major industry groups suffering the most serious job losses were retail trade (-775), manufacturing (-194), trade, transportation and utilities (-140), and leisure and hospitality (-89).
- The major source of industry growth was in the health care and social science sector, which gained 1,032 jobs in 2006. More than half of the growth in this sector occurred in hospitals. The construction sector also added 433 jobs. The professional and technical service sector also added 312 jobs.
- In Central Massachusetts, the three largest employment sectors in 2006 were health and social services (roughly 40,000 jobs), retail establishments (roughly 29,000 jobs) and manufacturing (roughly 27,500 jobs).
- Between 2004 and 2005 the annual average wage in Central Massachusetts increased by \$757 or 1.8%, while the State annual average increased by \$1,163 or 2.4%. The 2004 annual average wage for Central Massachusetts was \$42,035, well below the State's annual average wage of \$50,097.
- In Massachusetts, the professions earning the highest annual average wage for 2005 included management (\$99,600), legal services (\$91,850) and computer and computer and mathematics (\$77,450). Conversely, the professions earning the lowest annual wage in 2005 included food preparation/serving (\$21,750), farming/fishing/forestry (\$25,010), and personal care services (\$26,470).

The Massachusetts Division of Unemployment Assistance periodically prepares long-term employment forecasts for the State. The Division has divided the State into 16 Service Delivery Areas (SDAs), and Paxton falls within the Southern Worcester SDA, which covers 47 communities. The Division's latest long-term employment forecast for the Southern Worcester SDA was prepared in 1998 and looks ahead to 2008. The key findings of this latest forecast are as follows:

- The Southern Worcester SDA had 254,910 jobs in 1998 and this will increase to 276,050 jobs by 2008, an increase of 21,140 jobs or 8.3%. This growth rate is less than the State's growth rate (10.1%) due largely to the Southern Worcester SDA's smaller share of the fastest growing industries.
- In addition to the 21,140 new jobs to be created by 2008, there will be 60,000 replacement openings among existing jobs.
- Of the 21,140 new jobs to be created by 2008, 90% of these new jobs will be in the service sector. Within the service sector, 45% of the newly created jobs will be of the health and social services variety and 37% will be business services.
- Manufacturing jobs will continue to decline in each of the State's SDAs, with the Southern Worcester SDA projected to lose roughly 4,000 manufacturing jobs between 1998 and 2008.

- The rise in construction job growth will moderate in all of the State's SDAs. Factors slowing growth in this sector include a slowing of the population growth and household formation that will reduce the demand for single-family homes, and technological changes (e-commerce, telecommuting, etc.) that will moderate the demand for new office space.
- Within the various economic sectors, professional and technical workers will gain the most new jobs (53% of the new jobs) in the Southern Worcester SDA.
- The fastest growing occupations in the Southern Worcester SDA will be computer support specialists, computer engineers, biological scientists, home health aides, systems analysts, paralegals and legal assistants, medical assistants, social/human service assistants, electrical technicians, special education teachers and medical records technicians.

The Greater Worcester Area Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee is the regional entity charged with forging an economic strategy for Central Massachusetts. The Committee is comprised of members from the Greater Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission and the Worcester City Manager's Office of Economic Development. Every year the Committee prepares an annual report that outlines its regional economic development strategy, notes trends in the regional economy and highlights successful projects. Having a regional CEDS Committee is a prerequisite for obtaining grants from the US Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration.

Community Preferences for Economic Development

The Master Plan Committee survey conducted in the Fall of 2006 asked a variety of questions relating to economic development. When asked what Paxton should look like in the future, remain a bedroom/agricultural community garnered the most votes (216), followed by should have a few more commercial uses but should remain residential (191) and should be a residential/agricultural community with additional commercial zones serving local needs (187). The responses to this question indicate there is a split among residents about the presence of commercial uses in Paxton's future.



When asked if Paxton should pursue economic development, no received the most votes (229), followed by yes, to broaden the tax base (212) and yes, to create jobs and provide services for residents (136). Again there is slight majority that wishes to keep Paxton exactly as it is today.

When asked what type of additional business residents would like to see in Paxton, restaurant was the overwhelming favorite (364), followed by gas station (297) and small-scale retail stores (164), indicating that there is a desire for services among a clear majority of residents. The businesses that did not receive much support were large-scale retail stores, clothing stores and fast food establishments.

The survey results are indicative of a population divided about the future of the economic sector in Paxton. A slight majority wishes for it to remain unchanged, while the minority favors growth and expansion. The survey does indicate that there is consensus on one matter; retaining Paxton's rural character is most important of all.

Opportunities for Economic Development

As outlined in the Municipal Facilities and Services Chapter, Paxton has a long list of financial needs (mostly capital equipment and facility needs) that must be addressed over the next decade. Paxton's commercial sector has managed to keep pace with the recent increases in housing and population, but without some future growth of the tax base it will be up to the homeowners to cover an even larger portion of the Town's operating budget. Currently, Paxton has very little vacant commercial land and there is not wide public support for changing this situation. However, there is a general consensus that small businesses and service establishments (a gas station and restaurant) may fit into the Town's character and compliment those commercial enterprises that currently exist. The question becomes, what opportunities for appropriate economic development exist for Paxton? The following options are resources that Paxton **MAY** choose to explore in the future should the Town feel that a more concerted economic development effort is needed.

1. *The Paxton Market Site*: Located near the geographic center of town this site is currently occupied by the Paxton Market (which includes a limited service Post Office), The Pampered Pet, Waterwheel Realty and the Barre Savings Bank. This is the densest commercial area in Paxton. Its location (on Route 122 and near Route 31) and the fact that the site is currently underutilized all create an opportunity to expand business at this location. Any expansion would most likely require the rezoning of abutting property to allow By Right commercial development and could include new commercial zoning that addresses issues such as; design guidelines, square footage limits and use restrictions. Additionally there may be an option for access to the parcel from West Street in the vicinity of the current Police Station (which will be vacated upon completion of the Town's new Public Safety Complex). This would allow for more flexibility in traffic flow and increase the ability of patrons to access the site.

2. *MassDevelopment*: MassDevelopment acts as the State's industrial financing authority. It works primarily with industries and non-profit organizations; however, it does offer several programs that provide technical assistance to municipalities. MassDevelopment administers the Predevelopment Assistance Program that can help municipalities fund projects that will result in economic benefits to the community and the region. MassDevelopment can help with site-specific projects and can assist with appraisals, financing, site planning and architectural services. It should be noted that MassDevelopment has a regional office in Worcester.

3. *The Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)*: SCORE is a division of the Small Business Administration and they maintain an office with the Greater Worcester Area Chamber of Commerce. Consisting of retired business executives that volunteer their time, SCORE councilors are available for free consultations on any business-related problem.

4. *Central Massachusetts Small Business Development Center (SBDC)*: The Central Massachusetts SBDC is located on the campus of Clark University. They provide free and confidential one-to-one management advice and technical assistance to prospective and existing small businesses.

Business advisors will assist clients in developing their business plans, marketing plans, financials, cash flows and other areas critical to ensure a successful venture. Often times, they will also act as a common access point for financing, and upon evaluation by staff, can recommend or even introduce owners to the appropriate federal, state or local financing sources. They also work actively with local banks and the SBA, especially when SBA loan guarantees may be required to finance the venture or expansion. SBDC clientele includes start-up, early stage, expanding and troubled businesses. All programs are offered to the public on a non-discriminatory basis and are handicapped accessible.

5. *Economic Target Area Program (ETA)*: The ETA Program gives tax breaks to companies that expand and/or add jobs within a local community. The tax break is given only on new investments or expansions and does not apply to already existing property. This program may not be what attracts businesses to Paxton, but would be beneficial in that it will provide and incentive for new business to make improvements to their location and will be a useful tool for retaining existing business looking to expand.

Becoming an ETA allows the Town to offer Tax Increment Financing as a tool to attract or retain businesses. A local TIF program usually operates in the following manner: a new business or existing business wishing to expand would need to demonstrate that it would hire people from Paxton and the immediate area and that it would utilize local businesses and construction firms for its new/expanded building. In return, the Town would forgive a percentage of the taxes assessed on the new/expanded building over a period of several years. The percentage of forgiven assessed taxes would get smaller over a designated period of time. The establishment of a TIF project would require Town Meeting approval.

Local TIF programs have been the subjects of criticism lately due to concerns over lost tax revenue. However, citizens need to realize that local TIF programs help to keep jobs in their community (most of which are held by local residents), promote the use of local businesses for the building/expansion effort and help to attract new businesses that otherwise may not come to their community. A local TIF program in Paxton would be a valuable tool for attracting new businesses, especially when one considers that the Town cannot offer much in the way of infrastructure.

6. *Business Improvement District (BID)*: BIDs are intended to aid in funding improvements to commercial districts. The program works by collecting what amounts to a surcharge on property taxes in a district that is established locally by popular vote. Funds that are collected from the district are used to fund improvements exclusively for that district. This program has been used successfully for such items as flags, banners, parking studies, marketing materials and even additional street sweeping.

In the case of Paxton the commercial “districts” have been fully built out meaning there is very little to no vacant land available for new development. The built-out “districts” include mostly parcels where business were historically located and do not reflect a planned business district. Additionally, many businesses are located on properties zoned for residential use and are operating as non-conforming uses or by way of Special Permit. The vast majority of new commercial development in the town center area is likely to be in the form of rehabilitated existing structures or teardowns for replacement with new structures. The town center contains numerous residential properties that could be redeveloped/rehabilitated to create new retail/service enterprises that would contribute substantially more to the local tax base than do the current businesses on site.

The other option for Paxton would be to create a commercial district in an area where there is currently no business presence. This would give the Town the ability to identify a location that would be desirable for residents, business and Town officials. All the tools and programs listed above could be applied to a new district as easily as to an existing district. The other benefit of creating a new district would be the decentralization of commerce in Paxton. This would allow each commercial area to develop a collection of businesses that address the needs of the local residents and has the ability to create niche markets that are supported by those closest to the district and supplemented by others who are willing to travel for the goods and services offered by the specialized merchants.

Impediments to Economic Development

1. *Absence of a Municipal Sewer System:* The ability to tie into a municipal sewer system is one of the key elements that new businesses look for when deciding where to locate (in addition to municipal water, easy highway access and a skilled labor force). The lack of a sewer system is exacerbated, in Paxton, by the poor soils and difficulty experienced trying to perc in many areas of Town, making the installation of a septic system expensive if not impossible. These factors together would exclude most large companies for even considering Paxton as the location for new facilities and may exclude small business due to excessive capital costs. Several years ago, the idea of a sewer system was defeated at the Annual Town Meeting, a warrant article that sharply divided the Town and one which neither side is anxious to revisit anytime soon.

There are alternatives to the installation of town wide waste disposal including, mini-treatment plants and biological treatment systems. These options could be constructed by individual users or by the property owner in an effort to attract business to a specific property. In general these systems are cost prohibitive for small projects (akin to the type of development Paxton has expressed interest in) but may be a viable solution for a larger area comprised of multiple businesses that share waste disposal.

2. *Scarcity of Vacant Commercial Land:* Paxton has all but run out of commercially zoned land. Currently, if one would like to open a new business in Town one would need a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals to use residential land for commercial purposes. Allowing commercial uses by zoning variance is a poor economic development policy. Paxton may benefit from rezoning some of the residential land along Pleasant Street (Rt. 122) to allow some commercial use by right. These properties may become more desirable as commercial property because of

the increased traffic, which would be an attraction for business owners. Paxton residents have indicated a concern that more commercial uses will destroy the small town character that is important to them; this does not have to be the case. Small-scale retail and professional offices could be integrated into the existing structures on Pleasant Street with minimal disruption of the landscape. Doing so could potentially increase the valuation of these properties, add some tax revenue (that doesn't add to the school burden) and possibly bring some desired amenities to Paxton. The reuse of existing buildings and limits on the type of uses can be included in the bylaw as well as many other aspects of the look and overall feel of the district.

Economic Development - Goal

- Paxton aims to maintain the Town's rural character while managing the growth and stability of the Town's commercial uses. Economic Development should expand options for employment, serve commerce needs for Paxton residents and provide new business opportunities.

Economic Development - Objectives

- Plan for new economic development in a comprehensive manner that reduces the reliance on the use of variances and special permits for the location of individual businesses.
- Identify areas of Town for new economic development that will serve the residents of Paxton while maintaining the Town's rural character.
- Identify the desired character and design features for new commercial zones in Paxton.
- Revise zoning standards for the Town's Business districts to reflect the desired character and design features, to foster new economic development that is compatible with Paxton's rural character.
- Expand retail and service opportunities to reflect the desires expressed in the Master Plan citizen survey.

Economic Development - Recommendations

1. Establish a Local Economic Development Commission: The Town must establish a Local Economic Development Commission to coordinate all the various elements of Paxton's economic development strategy. Currently there is no entity to plan for and manage the future of Paxton's commercial sector. Finding volunteers for an Economic Development Commission will be a challenge, as it usually is finding volunteers for any board or commission in a small town. Local business owners could be included in the Commission's make up. The Commission would start by developing a description of the character that Paxton would like to be present in new economic development, reviewing the existing zoning scheme, tax policies, road improvement plans and water expansion plans as they relate to the location and retention of business in Paxton. The Commission would then work with various boards and departments to develop an economic development plan for Paxton. These entities

include but are not limited to the Board of Health, Finance Committee, Board of Selectmen, Water, Fire and Police Departments, emergency service, the School Board and the Municipal Light Department. The Town will need to be conscious of the past and how future economic development can continue to reflect the Town's character. Lastly, the Town needs to establish a single point of contact for economic development issues. One contact person is essential, as businesses want straight fast answers. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen

2. Develop a Description of Character for Paxton Center: (Economic Development Recommendation #2) The Master Plan Implementation Committee should hold a town wide visioning session to identify Paxton residents' idea of the character that exists or should exist in the Town Center. This session could be held on a Saturday morning to and should include a variety of pictures and perhaps a walking tour of the area denoted as Town Center to familiarize people with the extent of the district. This could be followed up with visits to several other communities with distinct commercial areas. These communities have been able to retain or create a character in their downtowns and may provide insight into how Paxton might proceed. All those who make the trip should bring a camera and note pad to record streetscapes and other features that they liked, found interesting or disliked. These experiences, notes and pictures should be compared and contrasted and there should be a follow up with Town officials in each town visited to identify if there is a Town policy in place that guided the development of that area. If there are policies that aided in creating the character of a business district it is important that they be documented and used in the revision of the Site Plan Approval Bylaw as recommended in #7 below. Responsible Municipal Entity: The newly formed Economic Development Commission with input from the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals
3. Survey Business Owners in Paxton: The current business owners in Paxton have a distinct perspective about the Town's economic sector, the changes that could be beneficial and the implications of introducing more commercial uses. The survey should be used to gauge the business community's feelings on future economic development in Paxton. Responsible Municipal Entity: The newly formed Economic Development Commission.
4. Review and Revise the Site Plan Approval Bylaw: The existing Site Plan Approval procedures within the Zoning Bylaws should be amended to give developers more guidance regarding how the Town would like to see commercial sites developed. The Town can clearly spell out its design preferences in the form of standards incorporated into the current Site Plan Approval procedures. Having such standards in place would ensure that new economic development enterprises are built in a way that blends the new buildings into Paxton's community character with minimal disruption to adjacent neighborhoods and existing traffic patterns. These standards could cover issues such as:
 - Access/egress,
 - Lighting,
 - Landscaping,
 - Signage,
 - Stormwater management and drainage,
 - Parking location and layout,
 - Facade appearance/materials,
 - Building size and location,
 - Fencing and screening, and
 - Snow removal.

The site plan approval process currently asks the developer to submit information on the above issues but offers no guidelines or standards on how they should be designed. The Planning Board can rectify this problem by clearly articulating a set of design standards, in the Bylaw, that reflect the community's preference for the reuse of existing building and the visual appearance of new economic development enterprises. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board

5. Limit the Amount of Commercial Floor Space Per Business: The results of the Master Plan Citizen Survey conducted clearly indicate that Paxton residents are not in favor of having the Town's commercial zoning district encourage large-scale retail operations, i.e. the "big box" retailers. In an effort to address this concern, it is recommended that the zoning bylaw be amended to place a floor space limitation on new businesses. Paxton's residents have a preference for small-scale retail operations that fit within the rural character of the Town where the current businesses are all below (most well below) 5,000 square feet. Instituting a floor area limitation for new businesses in the range of 5,000 – 7,500 square feet would be appropriate for Paxton's commercial zoning district. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board.
6. Develop a Computerized Database of Available Commercial Property: The Town should develop a computerized database of its available commercially zoned property as a service for new businesses investigating Paxton as a potential location. The database should be searchable by parcel size, availability of water, easements in place and any other information that a potential developer may find useful. Not only would such a database be useful to potential developers, it would show Paxton is business friendly and willing to provide resources in support of new commercial development. Responsible Municipal Entity: The newly formed Economic Development Commission in conjunction with the Board of Assessors.
7. Identify New areas in Town Suitable for Commercial Development: The 2001 Build out Analysis indicates that Paxton has very little vacant developable land zoned commercially. Combined with the fact that there is a very low commercial vacancy rate means there is little to no opportunity to locate a new commercial use in Town. The results of the Master Plan Survey indicate that there is a strong desire for the addition of limited new commercial uses, specifically a restaurant and gas station, as well as small scale retail and service establishments. Without the rezoning of land in Paxton the location of these uses will be unlikely.

The identification of these new areas may be best accomplished through a charrette. A charrette is basically a design focused public meeting where boards, committees, departments and the public get together to brainstorm ideas. Those in attendance will be divided into small groups to develop ideas and proposals. The groups will then present their schemes to the larger group for discussion. Ultimately the goal is to have at a minimum two possible alternatives for Paxton's planners to explore more in-depth prior to making any final proposal or recommendation. By holding a charrette all the stakeholders will have the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns, public officials will have the opportunity to

respond and the possibilities of reaching a consensus are increased. Responsible Municipal Entity: The newly formed Economic Development Commission.