

Towards a Passenger Station on the
East-West Massachusetts Train Line
The Case for Palmer



Town of Palmer, Massachusetts
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Center for Economic Development
UMass Design Center

UMASS
AMHERST

LA&RP
Landscape Architecture
& Regional Planning

June 1, 2019



Town Council

Councilors

Barbara A. Barry
President

Mary Salzmann
Vice President

Robert Lavoie
Council Clerk

Lorinda Baker

Matthew Lemieux

Michelle Sikes

Karl Williams

Charles T. Blanchard
Town Manager

Town of Palmer

Bondsville, Depot Village, Thorndike & Three Rivers
"The Town of Seven Railroads"

4417 Main Street
Palmer, MA 01069
Town: (413) 283-2603

May 20, 2019

To All Parties Interested in the East – West Passenger Rail Study:

We are writing this letter to formally advise you of the strong interest in support of the Town of Palmer creating a train stop at a station close to our town center. This support has also been expressed from the Town's Rail Steering Committee, members of the business community, many rail advocate groups, officials of nearby towns, and residents during a region-wide charrette.

To further support our interest, we asked the Center of Economic Development at the University of Massachusetts Amherst to prepare the attached concise report entitled "Towards a Stop on the East West Rail Line: The Case for Palmer" which explains the key reasons why a Palmer stop would make a significant contribution to the success of the line. We hope it is of value to you.

Should Palmer be recommended as a stop, the Town Council will immediately seek out means and methods of funding a comprehensive plan for Palmer. We anticipate that the funding of this plan will be primarily undertaken through federal and state grants, the assistance of the regional planning agency, and staff resources. We recognize that such a plan will take several years. For this reason, we will also focus on developing a plan that addresses the improvement of downtown Palmer. These improvements would be based on smart growth principles and include detailed options for the station, an intermodal transportation center, and a transit oriented development district.

We are quite excited about the possibility of having Palmer become, once again, the location of passenger service. As you may know, Palmer is known as "The Town of Seven Railroads". Railroads have been deeply embedded in our economy, heritage, and culture and having passenger service return to our town would be strongly embraced by the community. We hope that you can support our position.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Barry, President

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Center for Economic Development
UMass Design Center

UMASS
AMHERST

LA&RP
Landscape Architecture
& Regional Planning

Towards a Passenger Station on the East -West Train Lines
The Case for Palmer

Town of Palmer, Massachusetts
June 1, 2019

2

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful for the enthusiastic support of the Palmer Town Council. In addition, we are indebted to Ms. Sarah Szczebak, Community Development Director and Ms. Linda Leduc, Town Planner/Economic Development Director for their insights and guidance throughout the project.

Special thanks to UMass Regional Planning students Keith Benoit and Henry Mulvey for research and site analysis work, and to Evonne Gong, for design and technology assistance.



Palmer Library



Main Street, Palmer



Steaming Tender Restaurant at old train Palmer station.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Palmer: Strengths and Opportunities	7
Community Input	18
Conclusions	20
Moving Forward	21
Our Team	22
Appendices	24



Main Street, Palmer



Palmer: "Town of Seven Railroads"

Note: All photographs by UMass except as noted otherwise.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to examine the feasibility of the Town of Palmer becoming a passenger stop on a proposed East-West rail line that would connect to Union Station in Springfield and South Station in Boston. The report is presented in two parts. Part one presents the primary reasons that would make the case for a stop being placed in Palmer. The second presents a series of case studies to stimulate ideas on how Palmer could promote further growth through the creation of transit oriented development (TOD) around any future stop.

The findings in this report are based on a review of Palmer's current planning and regulatory documents, the results of a town wide charrette, interviews with public officials and business persons, analysis of publicly available data and a review of transit-oriented development projects across Southern New England. The findings are based on research undertaken from March through the end of May, 2019.

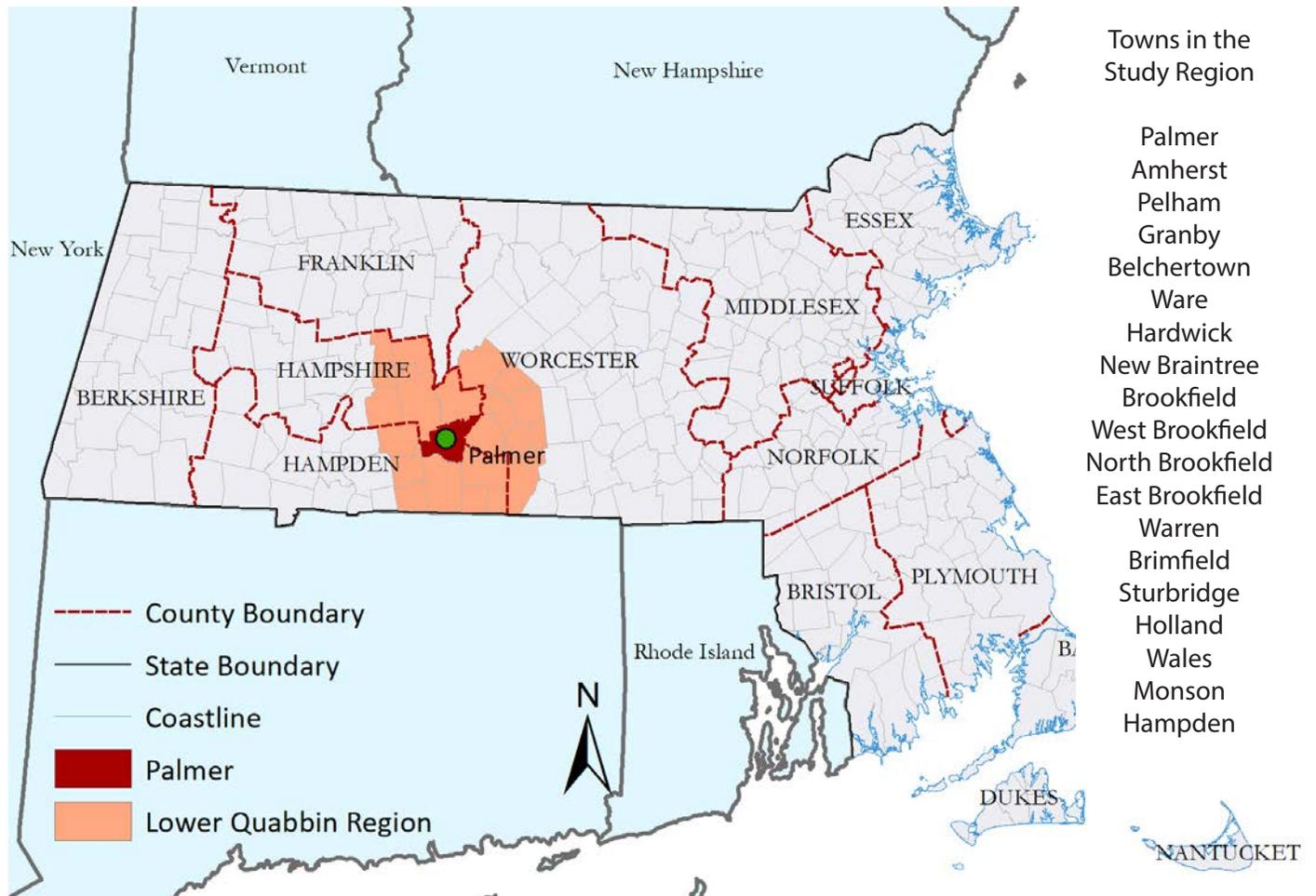
Palmer and the Lower Quabbin Region

The town of Palmer is located along the Quabboag, Swift and Ware Rivers in Hampden County, Massachusetts. Incorporated in 1775, it has a geographic size of thirty square miles and is surrounded by the towns of Ludlow and Wilbraham on the southwest, Belchertown on the northwest, Ware on the northeast, Warren on the east, Brimfield on the southeast and Monson on the south (Figure 1). It is situated on the easterly edge of the Springfield, Massachusetts Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Its nearest large population centers are Springfield (pop. 154,748, nineteen miles to the west) and Worcester (pop. 181,045, forty miles to the east).



Welcome to Palmer: View from Mass Turnpike Exit

Figure 1: The town of Palmer within the Lower Quabbin Region and State of Massachusetts



Due to its rivers and their rapid flow, Palmer became the home of quintessential mill villages in the nineteenth century, manufacturing a myriad of products and was served by several railroads. Originally called Depot Village, Thorndike, Three Rivers and Bondsville, each has maintained its own unique culture and mill village architectural character. Known as “The Town of Seven Railroads”, Palmer has been an important rail connecting point throughout its history. This is evident in the historic railroad infrastructure, parts of which still remain.

Recognizing that a rail passenger stop will clearly have impacts well beyond municipal borders, our study examines the prospective Palmer station within

the context of nearby communities. Building upon previous reports, we focus our attention on the 21-town Lower Quabbin Region, stretching from Amherst in the northwest to the Brookfields in the northeast and from Wilbraham in the southwest to Sturbridge in the southeast (Figure 1).

The region is characterized by former mill towns, suburban communities, agricultural communities, and centers of higher education. Although we believe that this region represents the primary market for regular patrons of a Palmer station, we acknowledge that some may travel from much further, especially given the easy accessibility to major interstates and highways. We also expect passengers from the border communities of northern Connecticut’s Quinnebaug Shetucket Valley.

Palmer: Strengths and Opportunities



- 1) Palmer and its nearby communities are an underserved region that could greatly benefit from the addition of East-West passenger rail service.

The Lower Quabbin Region is a significant market for potential rail ridership. There are just over 175,000 residents in the 21-community region (Table 1). The population is also heavily auto-dependent, with over 85% of the labor force commuting by car.

A significant number may opt to commute by rail, if a reasonable alternative were available. Consider Figure 2, which shows the place of work for residents of the Lower Quabbin Region. Although many residents work within the region or at scattered locations around

Table 1: Population Summary for Palmer and the Lower Quabbin Region, compared to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

	Town of Palmer		Lower Quabbin		Massachusetts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Population	12,237		175,636		6,789,248	
Median Age (in years)	44.0		40.8		40.1	
Population age 55 plus	4,141	33.8	51,018	29.0	1,951,445	28.7
Population 65 plus, living alone	772	53.4	7,140	47.0	300,786	40.9
Commute by private automobile	5,339	89.0	73,667	85.1	2,701,743	78.2
No vehicle households	407	8.2	3,724	6.0	320,661	12.4
Work at home	280	4.7	4,716	5.4	168,255	4.9
Commute 60 minutes or longer	620	10.8	6,313	7.7	404,957	12.3

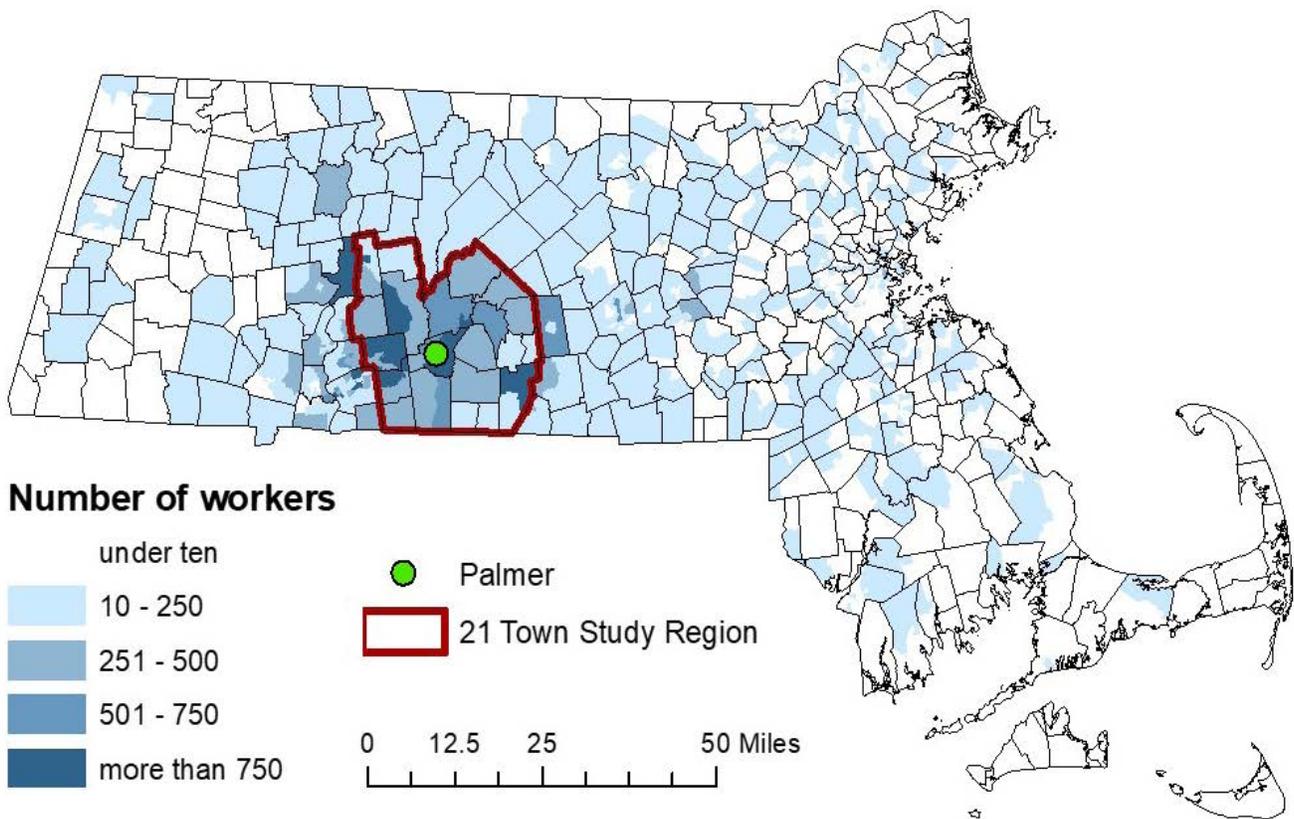
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014-2018 American Community Survey, Five year estimates

the state, there are noteworthy clusters working in downtown Worcester and Springfield, where other East-West rail stops are currently planned. In fact, we estimate that there are roughly 40,000 residents of the Lower Quabbin Region currently working within 10 miles of an existing passenger rail station on the East-West Amtrak line (Figure 2). These include Springfield (26,091), Worcester (6,964), Framingham (2,634), and South Station (4,500). Although the Lower Quabbin Region is primarily residential, there are also roughly 21,000 people who work in the study region that live within 10 miles of an Amtrak station on the East-West line. This represents 41 percent of the current employment base of the Lower Quabbin Region, with most coming from Springfield (15,656) followed by Worcester (3,094). These stations are currently serviced by Amtrak's Lakeshore Limited, which only runs once

per day in each direction and is ill suited for most commuters.

Without a stop in Palmer, it is highly unlikely that residents in this region would regularly use the train for east-bound travel. If the residents of Palmer or its neighboring towns desired to travel by train to and from Boston, they would have to travel either to Springfield or Worcester. To catch the train in Springfield requires them to travel westerly for approximately forty miles round-trip by auto and add an additional sixty minutes to their trip before they begin train travel. To catch the train in Worcester they would have to travel eighty miles round-trip and add approximately ninety minutes to their journey before catching the train.

Figure 2: Place of Work for Residents of the Lower Quabbin Region, by Census Tract



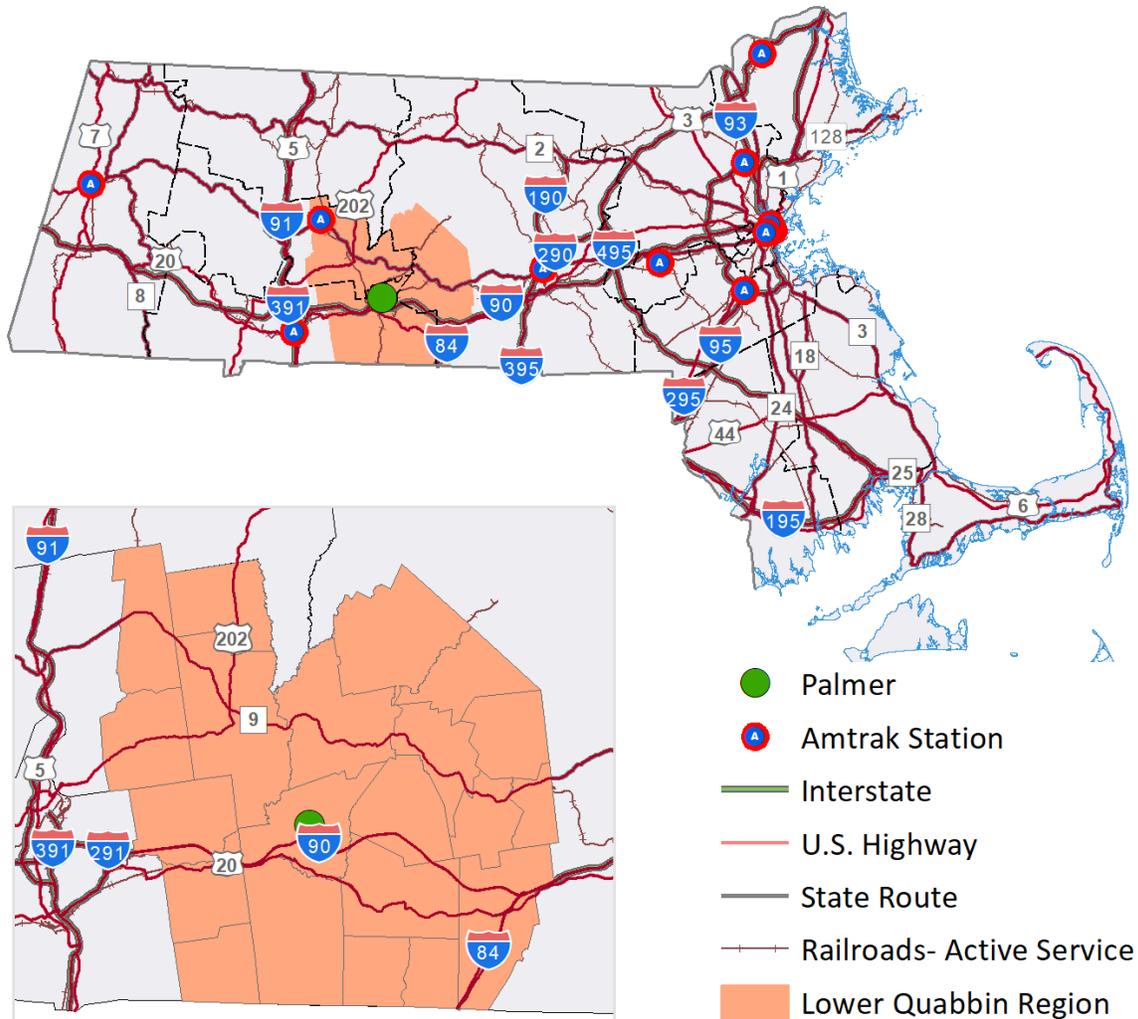
2) Palmer has a first-rate highway network that would allow easy access to and from a downtown station in all directions.

In a north-south direction one could access State Routes 181, 67 and 32. In an east-west direction there is access to Interstate 90 and State Route 20.

All four of these highways are within one mile of downtown.

The presence of a rail stop in the downtown Palmer would also have the potential to create an inter-modal transportation center focusing on rail, auto, bus, bicycle and pedestrian access and parking.

Figure 3: Interstates and major highway corridors

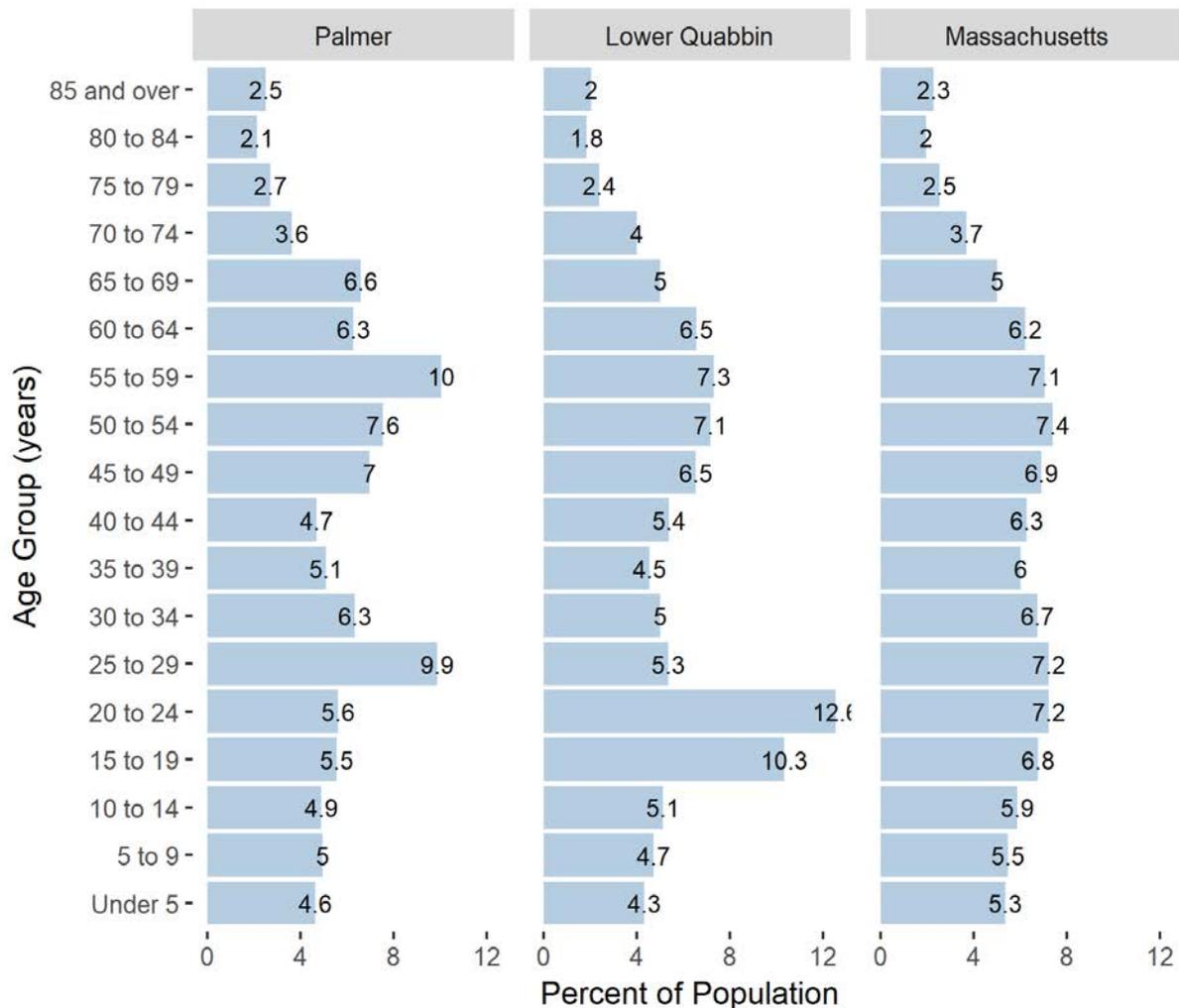


3) *The Lower Quabbin Region is home to many special populations that would stand to benefit greatly from improved accessibility.*

Over 50,000 Lower Quabbin Region residents are 55 years and older and the region has an inordinate concentration of elderly (65+) residents that live alone (Table 1). There is a particularly high concentration of persons in the 55 to 65 age bracket, despite the sizable presence of college students (mostly in the Amherst area) that skews the age distribution downward (Figure 4).

While there are first rate medical facilities in the region, the population must travel to either Worcester or Springfield for highly specialized care. Furthermore, we know from anecdotal evidence collected at the community charette that many older residents in the area have family and friends in Eastern Massachusetts, and would greatly welcome passenger rail service as a safe, reliable alternative to long drives for social visits.

Figure 4: Age Distribution of Palmer and the Lower Quabbin compared to Massachusetts

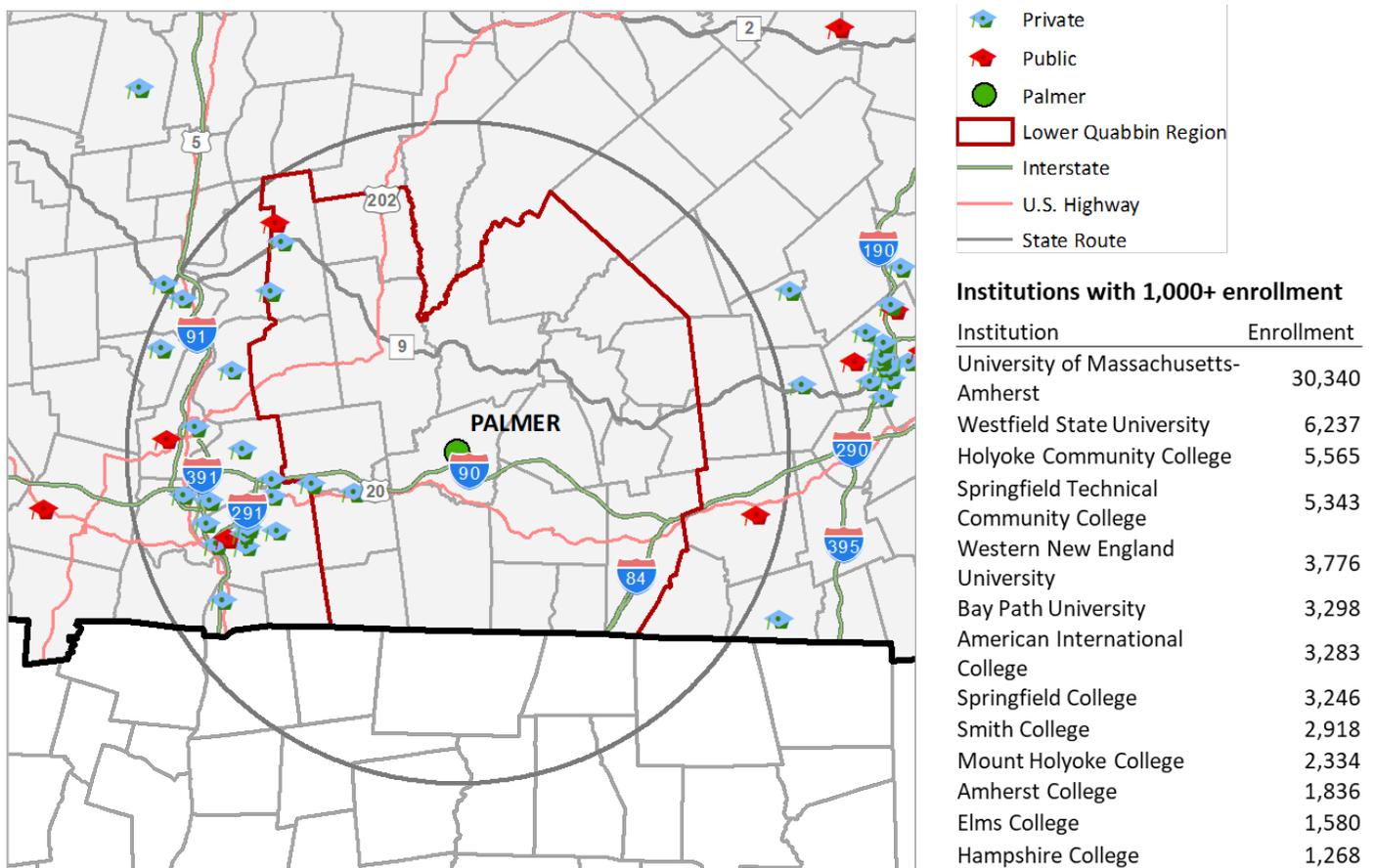


4) A train stop in Palmer would tap into the University of Massachusetts faculty, staff and student populations. It would also attract riders from other nearby colleges.

A Palmer station would provide the most natural rail access point for college students in the mid-Pioneer Valley, many of whom regularly travel east for family visits, internships, or recreation. There are 26 colleges and universities located within 20 miles of downtown Palmer, combining for a total enrollment of over 70,000 full- and part-time students (Figure 5). Of particular interest are UMass Amherst and the other members of the five-college network (Amherst College, Mount Holyoke, Smith, and Hampshire), which collectively account for nearly 40,000 students and are interconnected by a free shuttle bus system.

These students would be more apt to use the train if there was a stop in Palmer (see the letter attached from Amherst town manager Paul Bockelman in Appendix A). Prior to the opening of the Amtrak Vermonter line, Amtrak offered service to the Amherst station, with annual boarding of just over 13,000 as of 2009. The Amherst station closed in 2014. It is also worth noting that the Northampton Amtrak Station attracted over 20,000 travelers in its most recent year of operations, the second most (next to New York City) of any stop on the Vermonter line. While we do not have pinpointed data, we believe a large share of these riders are tied to the colleges and are journeying to Connecticut, New York City and other southerly stops. They are not currently traveling from Northampton to make a connection in Springfield to connect to Boston. Such a trip would add a forty mile round-trip in a westerly

Figure 5: Public and Private Colleges within 20 miles of Palmer



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Post-Secondary Educational Data System (IPEDS)

direction to Northampton and an additional forty minute round-trip southerly to Springfield before catching the train to the east.

5) *A train stop in Palmer would provide a tremendous boost to the Commonwealth’s goal to expand homeownership opportunities to low and moderate income workers.*

The cost of housing inside the I-495 beltway is increasingly well beyond the means of low and moderate income workers. Indeed, we are increasingly hearing the phrase “drive until you qualify” which translates to the need for such workers to seek out affordable homes well beyond their workplaces and what could be considered a normal commute.

Providing a passenger rail stop in Palmer would increase access to a range of housing options and styles, from pastoral farmhouses to modern ranches and capes in existing developments. And vacant parcels are available for those wishing to design their dream home. There

are roughly 70,000 housing units in the region, of which roughly 5,500 are vacant (Table 2). The existing housing stock is predominantly single-family homes, with nearly 500 homes on the market (on average) as of 2014-2017. However, over a quarter of the region’s housing stock are rentals – so there are plenty of options for those not ready to buy. There are nearly 1,300 rental units in Palmer alone, making them relatively accessible from a number of prospective station sites.

Housing is also very affordable in the Lower Quabbin Region where the typical home value is \$130,000 less than the statewide median and the average apartment rents for almost \$300 less per month (Table 2).

Housing in Palmer is especially affordable, where the typical home is less than \$200,000 and average rent is near \$800 per month. The value is greater still when you consider the difference between prices in the Lower Quabbin Region to the Greater Boston region where many neighborhoods have median home values in excess of \$500,000 (Figure 6).

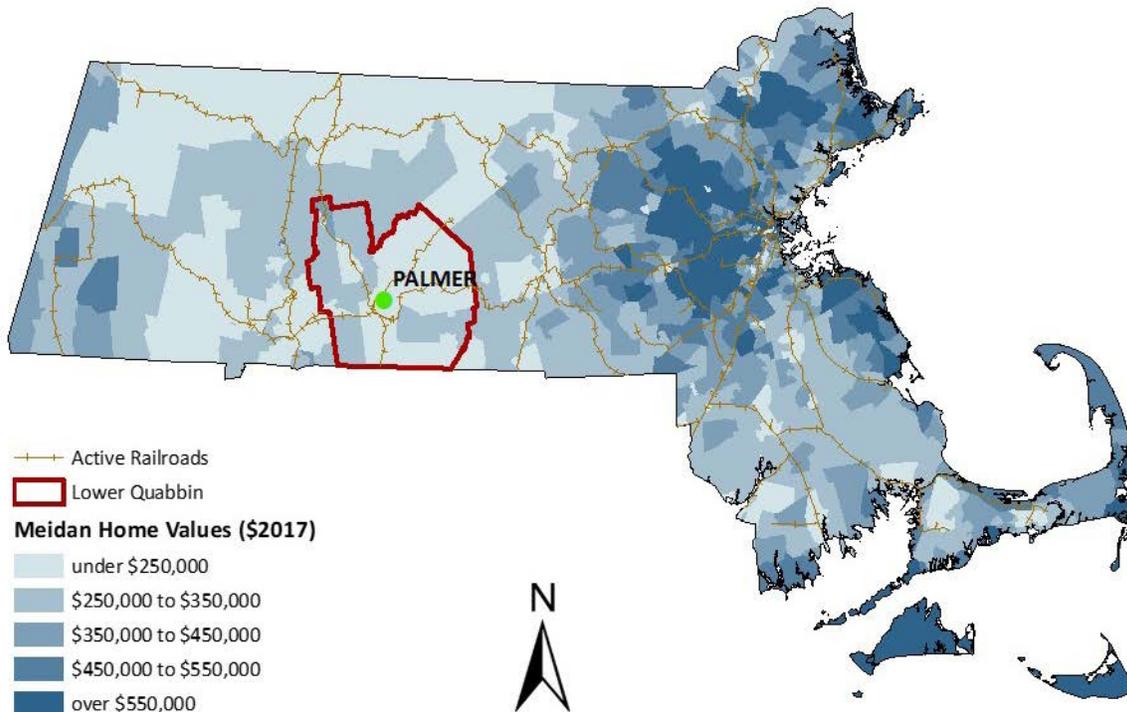
Table 2: Housing Summary for Palmer and the Lower Quabbin Region, compared to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

	Town of Palmer		Lower Quabbin		Massachusetts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Civilian Labor Force*	6,478		95,650		3,805,400	
Unemployment*	302	4.7	3,420	3.6	127,000	3.6
Adults (25+) with no degree**	695.0	7.6	8,975	8.1	458,080	9.7
Adults with Bachelor's or Higher**	2,452.0	26.9	40,476	36.6	1,980,861	42.1
Families living in Poverty**	334	13.0	2,084	5.4	128,527	9.0
Median Household Income**	\$58,377		\$70,721		\$78,706	

*Source: 2018, Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance Economic Research

**Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014-2018 American Community Survey, Five year estimates

Figure 6: Median home values (\$2017) by census tract



The difference in quality of the housing stock is equally striking. When comparing the prices of similar types of houses in both regions, housing around Palmer provides considerably more value, as measured by square foot, infrastructure and age (Figure 7). In Palmer, you can buy a two bedroom 864 sq ft condominium for less than \$100,000. By comparison, nearly the same price gets you a one bedroom with half the space in Boxboro. In Revere, a similar sized condominium listed for roughly \$275,000, which is more than enough to purchase a nearly 3,000 sq ft., 4 bedroom, 2.5 bath home in Palmer.

6) *There is ample space for a train station in downtown Palmer.*

Palmer has long served as a hub for train traffic. It served as a passenger stop until 1971. Presently there is an active spur to the Palmer Industrial Park.

The tracks are placed directly adjacent to downtown and Main Street. Several potential sites provide sufficient land for a future stopping point. Other planning reports have discussed a location at the former station (now a restaurant) and other locations on either side of the tracks and Main Street.

7) *Palmer is at the center of a region that is in need of an economic boost.*

Palmer and the Lower Quabbin Region represent a seemingly “forgotten region” that is in significant need of economic revitalization. Many of the former employment centers of the region have shed manufacturing jobs since the 1970s and have witnessed sluggish population and economic growth in the years to follow.

Although incomes for certain neighborhoods hover near the state median (Figure 8), the region as a whole

Figure 7: Housing available for similar price, Lower Quabbin Region compared to Greater Boston

Housing typology available for \$100,000 budget

Location: Palmer



\$92,900
Condo
2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom,
864 sqft



Location: Greater Boston, Boxboro
(28 miles from Boston)



\$99,000
Condo
1 bedroom, 1 bathroom,
409 sqft



Housing typology available for \$300,000 budget

Location: Greater Boston, Revere



\$275,000
Condo
1 bedroom, 1 bathroom,
470 sqft



Location: Palmer



\$263,500
4 bedrooms, 2,5 bathrooms,
2,904 sqft



Housing typology available for \$400,000 budget

Location: 21 Town, Ludlow



\$399,900
4 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, 3,244 sqft

Location: Greater Boston, Revere



\$339,900
2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, 602 sqft

lags the state with lower household incomes and higher unemployment rates (Table 3). The town of Palmer is particularly distressed with an above average unemployment rate, lower educational attainment, and a poverty rate that is four percentage points higher than the state average.

The presence of a rail stop in Palmer would provide a much-needed stimulus to growth in the area where it is most needed. Although a passenger train station is typically not sufficient on its own, it can act as an anchor to support retailers and restaurants, especially when combined with policies that encourage integrated housing, streetscaping, and other area improvements (see TOD case studies in Appendix).

Figure 8: Median Household Income by Census Tracts

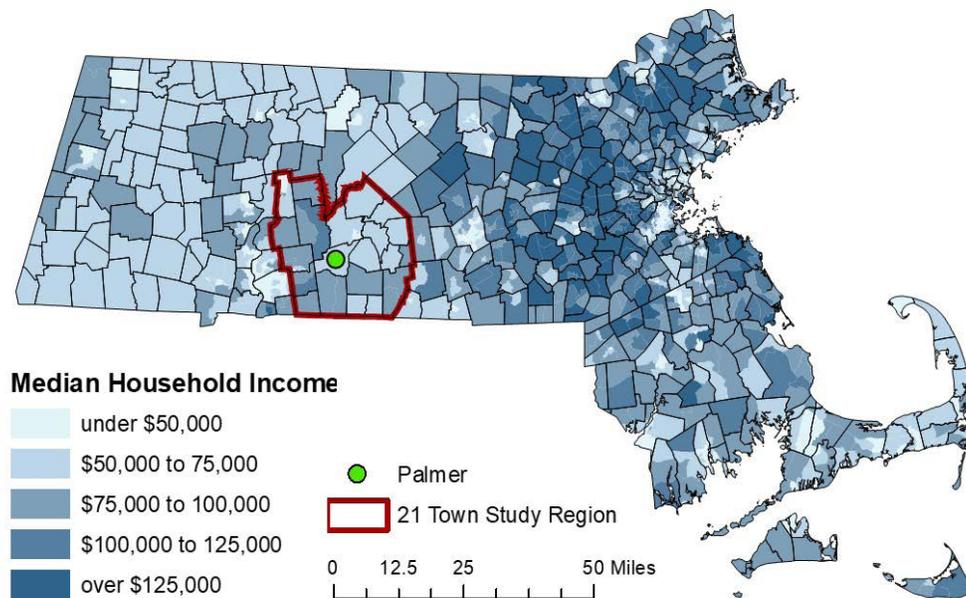


Table 3: Economic Summary for Palmer and the Lower Quabbin region, compared to Massachusetts.

	Town of Palmer		Lower Quabbin		Massachusetts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Housing Units	5,412		67,431		2,864,976	
Vacant housing units	476	9%	5,595	8%	279,274	10%
Owner-occupied housing units	3,689	68%	45,751	68%	1,612,329	56%
Homes for sale	37		469		17,268	
Median Home Value (\$2017)	\$186,867		\$251,813		\$385,239	
Renter-occupied housing units	1,247	32%	16,085	32%	973,373	44%
Apartments for rent	52		611		41,228	
Monthly Median Gross Rent (\$2017)	\$806		\$978		\$1,255	

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014-2018 American Community Survey, Five year estimates

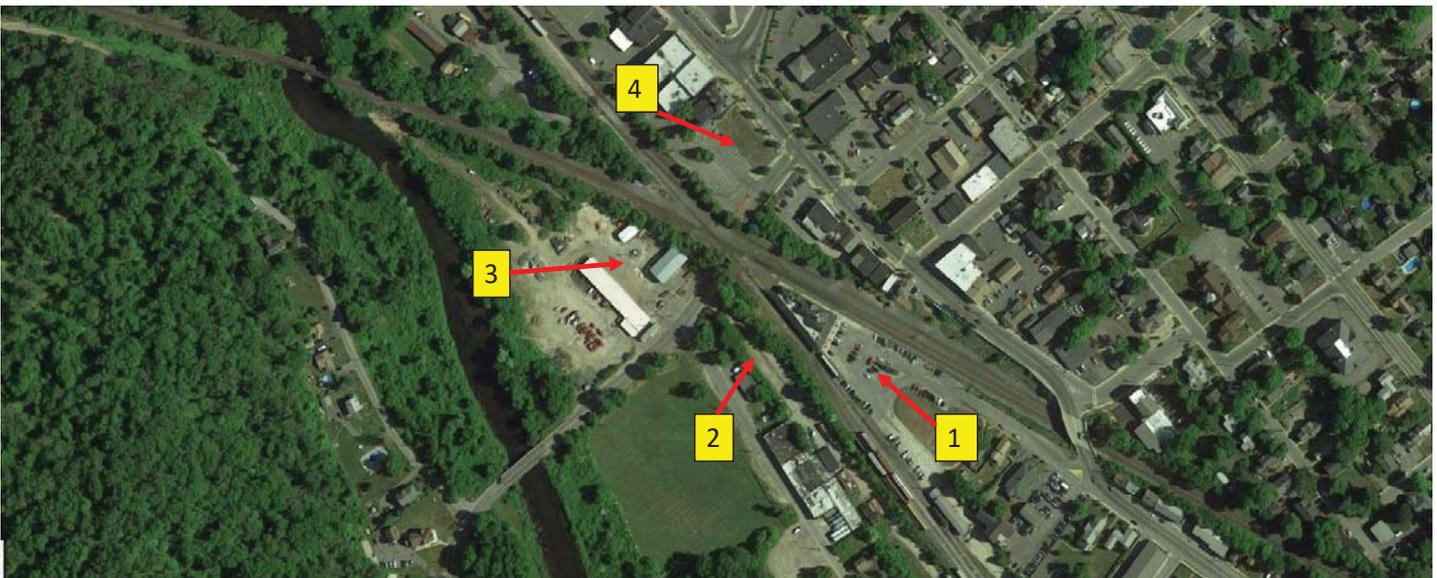
8) *The Town of Palmer envisions the downtown station site to be a major stimulus for the regeneration of its historic center.*

The focal point of train traffic in the “Town of Seven Railroads” is Depot Village. This is the area surrounding the old Depot, and the nearby Main Street corridor. The area offers a mix of attractive traditional buildings and pedestrian scale streetscapes that could be the building blocks for related transportation developments. With new investment, the area can become the starting point for a downtown resurgence. Depot Village location also provides ample parking available at street level throughout downtown with clear sight lines between Main Street and all of the potential station locations (Figure 9). There is minimal crime in the area over the last decade. If selected, the town would endeavor to develop a master plan that would lay out a strategy for the area which would address all of the elements necessary to support train stop functions. Most notably, it will explore the possibility of creating a Transit Oriented Development zoning district and inter-modal transportation center adjacent to the stop.



Downtown Palmer provides a range of opportunities for a train station and T.O.D. development.

Figure 9: Four prospective downtown locations for a Palmer train stop (Fuss & O’Neil, 9/26/17)





Main Street, Palmer

9) *A downtown station in downtown Palmer would contribute to meeting the principles of smart growth.*

A downtown station means it would be constructed in a built-up area of the town and it would not require extensive sewer or water upgrades. It would be in an area that is pedestrian friendly and marked by a mixture of homes and shops. There is sufficient space to create intermodal connectivity, it lends itself to transit oriented development and it would contribute to re-investment and regeneration. At the same time, a downtown station would contribute to concentrated development and be in an area that would be suitable for higher density housing.

10) *A downtown Palmer station would be a prime opportunity for a public-private partnership.*

This form of agreement is becoming increasingly popular across the United States as a development strategy to revitalize cities and towns. Palmer’s proximity to multiple highways, its historic character,

and a new train stop, together with the potential for Transit Oriented Development (using Smart Growth principles) would provide a significant incentive for this type of approach.

11) *A downtown Palmer site would lend itself to increased rider comfort.*

Based upon Amtrak standards, only as an example, one would expect that the Palmer downtown site be considered as a “Category Four Station”. Such stations typically attract up to 20,000 passengers per year. Typically, Amtrak would only require a platform, signage, lighting, train information and a canopy for these stops. There are no opportunities to purchase food or retail products and there are no restrooms at these stops. However, downtown sites provide the opportunity for the integration of surrounding retail establishments with the train waiting experience. In Northampton, (a Category Four Station) for example, a local restaurant and bar welcomes passengers to its facilities as an informal waiting room and allows them the use of restroom facilities. In addition, the site offers free Wifi and allows overnight parking for a fee in its trackside parking area.

The Northampton experience could be replicated in Palmer.

12) *There is strong support in Palmer for the placement of a train stop in its downtown area.*

This has been exhibited in public meetings, interviews and at the community workshop. At the meeting, virtually all participants were enthusiastic about the idea of a downtown stop, and view it as an opportunity for revitalization, while improving connections to once distant places.

In addition, outside of Palmer, the town has received extremely positive letters of support from the towns of Amherst, Brookfield, Ware and other nearby towns. (See the appendices for additional information about local support).

Community Input



Nearly 100 Palmer residents took part in a community workshop/charrette on Saturday, March 16, 2019. The event included a lively conversation about existing conditions in the town, (strengths, weaknesses and threats) and opportunities that an East-West train stop could help provide for a more prosperous future.

Strengths

Palmer is well situated at the center of a sub-region between Worcester and Springfield.

A commuter line including Palmer would increase connectivity to nearby employment centers and make Palmer a more viable place to grow businesses.

A commuter stop could bring the region's affordable and high quality housing to train commuters.

A commuter line would make travel to nearby colleges, (UMass, Amherst College, Hampshire College and the University of Connecticut) more viable.

There is ample space for a train station in downtown.

Space is available downtown to create parking and an intermodal transportation center.

Palmer is well connected by state roads in all directions.

The Town is seen as being supportive of this initiative.

Commuter line could help link the hospital in Palmer to other hospitals (Baystate and UMass Medical Center).



Community Input (cont'd)

Weaknesses

- The town has an insular mentality where village interests often come before Town needs.
- Schools are not as strong as they should be.
- Parts of downtown have an "edgy" character.
- There is lack of employment opportunities in the region.
- We lack the funds to undertake a large project like this.
- The Palmer Pike exit is only one without a hotel/motel.
- Palmer lacks a Master Plan.
- Our mills are not fully occupied.
- The only alternative to driving is Peter Pan Bus.
- Access to the existing station site is less than optimal.
- Local internet connectivity is not state of the art.
- We are losing Millennials.

Threats

- We are at the mercy of the power of political interests inside I-495.
- We are unable to prepare a Master Plan.
- Our fate is controlled by CSX and Peter Pan.

Young people are leaving.
Springfield interests will prevail.

The Villages don't come together to support the Town.

We are unprepared for growth.

We are unable to finance necessary improvements.

Opportunities

- We can take advantage of connecting the Pike exit to downtown.
- We can bring our Villages together to benefit all.
- We can expand our regional connectivity.
- We can create more jobs in downtown.
- Mills could be revitalized and attract more investment.
- We have plenty of parking, and land available.
- A commuter stop can help to reduce traffic on the Pike.
- There are grant funds that could help finance part of the project.
- We need to tap into tourist opportunities including the Woo Sox and the Polar Express.
- We need to identify ways to better market Palmer.

Conclusions

In the introduction of the report we explained that the main purpose was to make the case for Palmer's selection as a site for a passenger railstop on the East-West Rail-line running from Springfield to Boston.

Based on interviews with members of the business community, team leaders, a community wide charette and a review of quantitative data focusing on the Lower Quabbin Region of twenty-one towns, it is clear that a strong case can be made.

- Palmer provides the best intermediate location between Springfield and Worcester.
- Palmer has the ample and appropriate infrastructure for a stop, including several available sites in the downtown area.
- A Palmer stop will open up an underserved region to passenger rail service and will expand the commuting capabilities for those working in eastern locations wishing to purchase an affordable home.
- A Palmer stop will increase rail access for Five College students.
- A Palmer stop is strongly supported by the townspeople and the local government.

We agree with the findings of the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative (June 2016) and the Central Corridor Passenger Rail Feasibility Study (2017) that Palmer would be a strong site for passenger service.



Thorndike Street (Rt. 32, Palmer)



Depot Village Park

Moving Forward

At the-town wide charrette and later interviews the question was raised concerning how the Town of Palmer would move forward should it be selected as a train stop site. While the actions may be stipulated by the Commonwealth's regulations and statutes, the following would appear to be logical steps for the town to consider. It is assumed that upgrading the tracks and the right-of-way would be the responsibility of the state. It is also assumed that the development of the site designated for the stop would be the responsibility of the town. With these points in mind, the following basic actions at a minimum should be considered as the project goes forward:

1. The Planning Director and the Community Development Director would work with the East-West Rail Advisory Committee to determine structural expectations.
2. The Planning Director and the Community Development Director would apply for grant funds to undertake a comprehensive plan for downtown Palmer through the United States Economic Development Administration's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Program, state grant programs and the Regional Planning Commission's technical assistance program.
3. As part of this downtown master plan, the town would undertake a study concerning the historic and architectural character of the downtown with the intent of determining its eligibility for designation as an historic district.
4. The Planning Director would review the existing downtown zoning by-law to ensure that there are no impediments to the creation of a train stop. If there are impediments, draft revisions would be prepared for review by local authorities.
5. Working with the Regional Planning Commission, the Planning Director would draft a Transit Oriented Development by-law based upon smart growth principles and circulate it to the local authorities.
6. The Planning Director and Community Development Director, as part of the downtown planning effort would explore possibilities for providing area-wide Wifi service centering on the location of the train stop. This alone would be a major attraction for waiting passengers and local restaurants.
7. The Planning Director and the Community Development Director would prepare a request for proposals for the development of the train stop and circulate it to downtown property owners with the idea of creating a public-private partnership at the train stop. The proposals will be reviewed by Palmer's Economic Development Advisory Committee and sent to the Town authorities for approval.

Our Team

Dr. John R. Mullin, FAICP: Associate Director,
Center For Economic Development

Dr. Mullin is an Emeritus Professor of Regional Planning at UMass Amherst, and former Dean of the Graduate School. His research and professional interests focus on industrial revitalization and downtown planning. A Senior Fulbright Scholar, Dr. Mullin has written or edited over 100 book chapters, book reviews, technical reports, journal articles, and conference proceedings. He is a retired Brigadier General from the United States Army National Guard.

Dr. Henry Renski: Director, Center For Economic
Development

Dr. Renski is an Associate Professor of Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Graduate Program Director of the Ph.D. in Regional Planning, and the Associate Director for the Institute for Social Science Research. His research focuses on understanding the technological and social forces driving regional economic competitiveness and transformation, and building upon this knowledge to improve the effectiveness of economic development policy. He has authored or consulted on over two dozen economic impact studies during his career.

Michael Di Pasquale: AICP & AIA

Michael is a licensed architect and urban planner. His research and teaching focuses on the revitalization of America's "Legacy Cities", the country's great manufacturing centers. He is Director of the UMass Amherst Design Center in Springfield, a university-community collaborative that focuses on downtown design/revitalization projects. In addition, he is co-founder of "Make-It Springfield" a creative workshop and art space installed in a formerly vacant storefront as catalyst for revitalization. He teaches Urban Design and Community Engagement courses at UMass Amherst, where he is an Extension Assistant Professor of Regional Planning.

Lara Furtado: Ph.D Candidate, Regional Planning

Lara Furtado is currently a Ph.D. student in the Regional Planning department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She is a trained architect from the Federal University of Ceará in Brazil and was a visiting student at Parsons The New School for Design in New York. She studies urbanism in a non-traditional way in order to challenge social and structural problems from a practical and direct approach. Her dissertation will focus on informal settlements in Brazil as culturally valuable and lively neighborhoods for economic and social success. Furtado's current work in the UMass Amherst Design Center in Springfield consists of studying Legacy Cities such as Springfield and how design institutions and community-based groups can have a transformative role in revitalization.

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Center for Economic Development
UMass Design Center



Towards a Passenger Station on the East -West Train Lines
The Case for Palmer

Town of Palmer, Massachusetts
June 1, 2019

About The Center for Economic Development

The Center for Economic Development (CED) is a research and community-oriented technical assistance center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Housed in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, the CED provides technical assistance, undertakes critical studies, disseminates information, and enhances local and multi-community capacity for strategic planning and development. This approach is designed to relate the concerns and goals of commerce and industry to those of the broader community. The CED works closely with community and business sectors, providing information and assistance needed for growth, management, and public benefit. The CED's clientele reflects that we work well with all sectors: community development corporations, state agencies, municipalities, regional planning agencies, developers, business leaders, chambers of commerce, local officials, public groups, and the managers of firms.

About The UMass Design Center

The UMass Amherst Design Center (The Design Center) opened in 2009 as a result of a collaboration between the Office of Planning and Economic Development from the City of Springfield and UMass Amherst to foster closer ties between the University's design and planning programs and the Springfield community, and to spur economic development. A storefront location was occupied downtown Springfield to host a range of activities. The Center, since the beginning, has served as research center, design studio, extension center, and community gathering space.



Appendices

A. Letter of Support: Town of Amherst

B. Letter of Support: Town of Brookfield

C. Letter of Support: Town of Hardwick

D. Letter of Support: Town of Ware

E. Letter of Support: Nearby Towns of Barre, Hardwick, Hubbardston, New Braintree and Oakham

F. Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Overview

G. TOD Case Studies/Examples



May 13, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you in support of a passenger rail stop in Palmer. This stop would benefit the Town of Amherst and the large number of college students who live in Amherst as the home of three major institutions of higher education. It would also benefit the year-round residents of the Town who travel to Boston with great frequency, whether it be for work, recreation, or medical services.

East-West passenger rail service is crucial to the economic development of western Massachusetts and Palmer is a logical stop for the new rail service. The Town of Amherst has been without passenger rail service, which also served Palmer, since 2014 when the Amtrak line was relocated to the Greenfield/Northampton corridor. Thousands of passengers had ridden that line prior to its closing. A stop in Palmer may be the beginning of the return of passenger rail service to Amherst.

Many daily commuters make the trip from Amherst to Palmer and then onto the Massachusetts Turnpike. It's the quickest way to get to Boston. A station in Palmer would permit these commuters and day-trippers to simply drive or take a shuttle to Palmer and arrive in downtown Boston without the stress and hassle of turnpike travel.

As you consider the feasibility of East-West passenger rail service, please strongly consider including a rail stop in Palmer.

Sincerely,

Paul Bockelman
Town Manager

Cc: Amherst Town Council



Brookfield Board of Selectmen

April 23, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

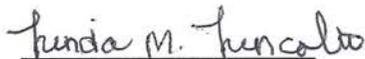
I am writing to you in support of a passenger rail stop in Palmer. East-West passenger rail service would be hugely beneficial to the greater Palmer area. This area is currently underserved by public transportation, creating difficulties for commuters, businesses, and residents without regular access to a vehicle. As Palmer is located roughly equidistant between Worcester and Springfield, it is an ideal location to capture the greatest number of potential riders. Adding to the convenience of the location, Palmer has an exit off of the Turnpike and Routes 20, 32, 67, and 181 pass through town and connect it to the region.

East-West passenger rail service would also create more opportunities for workers to commute to Palmer more easily, or to live in Palmer and travel outside of the area to get to work. The average home price in Palmer is affordable compared to prices in the eastern part of the state. Passenger rail service will allow for a host of other opportunities and benefits including tourism; local and regional development of residential, commercial, and industrial businesses; and an increased quality of life for residents of the region.

As you consider the feasibility of East-West passenger rail service, please strongly consider including a rail stop in Palmer.

Sincerely,

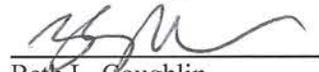
Brookfield Board of Selectmen



Linda M. Lincoln



Clarence R. Snyder



Beth L. Coughlin

6 Central Street, Brookfield, MA 01506 • 508-867-2930, Ext. 10 • www.brookfieldma.us

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Center for Economic Development
UMass Design Center

UMASS
AMHERST

LA&RP
Landscape Architecture
& Regional Planning

Towards a Passenger Station on the East -West Train Lines
The Case for Palmer

Town of Palmer, Massachusetts
June 1, 2019

26

TOWN OF HARDWICK
Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Planning Board, P.O. Box 575, Gilbertville, MA 01031
Phone: (413) 477-6197

Sarah Szczebak
Town Administration Building
4417 Main Street
Palmer, MA 01069

April 23, 2019

To whom it may concern,

The Hardwick Planning Board enthusiastically supports the idea of a commuter rail stop in Palmer – the Town of Seven Railroads! In many of our town meetings on potential economic development, the problem of few new establishments, inability to sell available housing, difficulty in attracting younger population to support the existing (and aging) infrastructure are discussed ad nauseam. The ability to commute to Worcester, Springfield, Northampton, etc - wherever the available jobs appear, would greatly enhance the potential for growth in our beautiful, idyllic, small town. It would be a relatively short car trip from Hardwick and the surrounding towns to Palmer for access to easy commuting. It would lessen the pressure on the Mass Pike, Route 9, etc. while encouraging more environmentally supportive transport. We have housing available and a great potential for supporting businesses that would enhance the standard of living for newcomers and established residents alike. We supply Boston and eastern towns with high quality water, so it would be great if they could show some reciprocal support for the central part of the state.

Sincerely yours,

Lucinda Childs, clerk

Hardwick Planning Board



Planning & Community Development
126 Main Street
Ware, Massachusetts 01082

t. 413.967.9648 ext. 118

April 29, 2019

Sarah Szczebak
4417 Main Street
Palmer, MA 01069

RE: Support of Palmer passenger rail service

Dear Ms. Szczebak,

This letter is on behalf of the Planning Board members in the Town of Ware regarding the matter of exploring a stop of the proposed East-West passenger rail service between Pittsfield and Boston. We feel including Palmer as a stop on the rail service would huge benefit to the surrounding communities, including the Town of Ware. When taking into consideration the existing amenities, access to highways, and small town character there is no doubt it will bring people and therefore economic vitality to the region.

Ware has been identified as an Opportunity Zone – this program will serve as an economic development tool to incentivize investment by offering favorable federal tax treatment for investors. The program is designed to drive increased investment in local opportunities, with the potential to support business growth, housing, and commercial construction. Our Opportunity Zone includes our beloved Millyard District – one of the many areas of Ware that is gaining back momentum. A rail stop in Palmer would give us the opportunity to build on our growing economic development and show visitors that Ware is somewhere worth seeing.

Increased economic vitality will help bring new jobs for all skill levels and provide better access to amenities, including healthcare. Help to give us the opportunity to grow, to revive, to give back to this community. We want to show people that Ware is somewhere worth living, somewhere worth investing, and somewhere worth exploring.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rebekah L. DeCoursey
Director of Planning & Community Development

April 01, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

With the Massachusetts Department of Transportation exploring both the viability and broader impacts of an East-West passenger rail service, we are writing in support of the creation of a stop within the town center of Palmer.

Palmer is ideally situated with existing infrastructure, and the creation of this stop would have far-ranging impacts upon the future economic development efforts of not only Palmer but the region as a whole. This stop would allow the region to leverage its attractive housing prices effectively with a more palatable commute, and attract a wider diversity of context-sensitive development -- prime challenges for the region's vitality going forward.

This area is currently bereft of an efficient East-West commuter train service, which would have a profoundly positive impact on the region's future, and instill a new sense of optimism for a brighter future.

With the position paper from The Center for economic Development forthcoming, we would like to extend our full support for the creation of a rail stop in Palmer for the Pittsfield-Boston commuter line expansion.

Sincerely,



Todd A. Miller

Regional Economic Development Coordinator
Towns of Barre, Hardwick, Hubbardston, New Braintree and Oakham



Transit Oriented Development (TOD)

At the community meeting/charrette residents identified a range of assets that are found in downtown Palmer. These include attractive older buildings (many available for new development) and a pedestrian-scaled, walkable setting. Residents appreciated the town's rich history and "sense of place." These are the kind of qualities that people increasingly look for when they choose a place to live (or visit).

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is an idea that also takes advantage of the kinds of strengths that places like Palmer have. Mostly mixed use projects, TOD integrates a range of transportation modes, including bus and rail with new development. Cities and towns with better connections to a range of transit options tend to be more vibrant and active.

TODs are typically:

- Located 1/4 to 1/2 mile (a 5-10 min. walk) to transit
- Have a mix of uses (housing, commercial, public)
- Are moderate to higher density developments
- Are pedestrian oriented, with access for all groups
- Have design features that emphasize pedestrian scale and the reuse of buildings
- Are integrated with surrounding uses and streets, promote walkable, healthy places.

The following pages include a group of TOD projects that can provide lessons for Palmer.



Main Street, Palmer



Main Street, Palmer

TOD Case Studies

Meriden, CT

The station and area adjacent show a lot of public investment: a Riverwalk, a new signature overpass, a few new residential development, Transit Oriented Development buildings in several locations, and new streetscape improvements including sidewalks and street lights. The extensive public investment here is obvious and typical for TOD.

The train station in Meriden is well connected to the downtown area with no major impediment between the station and the business district, except for the train tracks. What we see are clear sight lines from the station to the main retail/commercial district.

There is a commuter parking lot just outside the station. It contains approximately 55 parking spaces with about 20 of them occupied at the time of site visit.



TOD Case Studies

Concord, MA

The Concord Common development comprises three mixed use buildings with retail space, office space, and a restaurant. The new TOD is augmented by other mixed use buildings surrounding the Concord Center commuter rail station. The old station building represents a beautiful example of historic train stations of the mid-1800s. This preserved building houses a general store and a restaurant. The zoning required 146 parking spaces for the mix of uses train



Concord Station

(Source: www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit)

South Acton, MA

The station is located in a small, and quiet section of town that is, in many ways, comparable in image to Palmer. There is a large commuter parking lot on site for approximately 100 vehicles. All but 25 spaces were being used on day of site visit. The station functions as mostly “park and ride” with few people walking to the station.



TOD Case Studies

Windsor, CT

The train station in Windsor is very attractive, as is the adjacent area, which consists of the old, historic station that has been rehabbed. The nearby area has some new TOD housing developments. There is a commuter parking lot on site.

The site design encourages pedestrian traffic. Palmer would benefit its well-designed infrastructure and urban design seen here. The station is not directly in the downtown but very close to it. One large benefit is the station contains a very well-maintained public accessible bathroom that is open 24/7.

Windsor Locks, CT

The site is a few miles outside of the downtown area, at the site of an old passenger station. For now, the station consists of a new platform only, although there are plan to reopen the passenger station. The entire platform is 30 feet long, and includes a small bus shelter-like waiting area, with a bench . The platform is off of a main road and it's not connected to the downtown. Windsor Locks is primarily a commuter lot, functioning as a place to park your car and get on the train. The station is near on/off ramps for I-91, and is convenient for commuters.



TOD Case Studies

Ipswich, MA

The station is located within a thriving commercial center. There is a very small platform, visible from the main street. A commuter lot has space for about 100 cars. There are some several residential/mixed use buildings within 1/2 mile of station.



Lessons Learned from Case Studies/Site Visits

- Adjacent infrastructure/urban design improvements add to success of larger town initiatives.
- Stations that are close to town, are historic, and/or are integrated so that they reinforce a “sense of place” have become civic assets.
- Public/private partnerships provide good options to jump start development.
- Train stops have intangible (non-economic) benefits to a town’s civic pride and history. This would be especially true in Palmer.
- Intermodal option is working well (Meriden)