

## Existing Land Use and Zoning

The built environment, including the type, location, and intensity of existing land uses, defines the character of a community. Understanding how much land is presently devoted to commercial, industrial, residential, parks, and vacant land is a key component to developing a vision and plan for the future. Like other municipalities in Connecticut, Watertown's land use patterns are a reflection of its unique history, geography, economy, and transportation system. Initially a rural farming community, Watertown's population grew rapidly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as factories began locating along waterways such as Steele Brook. Watertown's village centers emerged in this period with a dense mix of industrial, residential, and commercial uses in close proximity to each other. After World War II, the rise of the automobile and economic restructuring led to decentralized and segregated land use patterns, which persist to this day.

### Existing Land Use

#### Residential

Residential land is the largest single land use in Watertown, comprising 38.1% of the total land area and 78.7% of all properties. Three residential categories were developed for the Existing Land Use map corresponding to different densities of housing.

#### Low Density Residential

Low density residential uses are concentrated in Watertown's rural northern and western neighborhoods. Low density residential areas correspond to the R-70 and R-90 zones and are comprised almost entirely of single-family homes on large lots. Low density residential areas often border agricultural land and other undeveloped lands. With an average lot size of 2.55 acres, most low density properties are large enough to accommodate wells and on-site septic systems.



*Low density residential areas are characterized by single-family homes on large lots, interspersed with agricultural land and other undeveloped land.*

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### Medium Density Residential

Medium density residential areas are located on the outer fringes of the villages and make up 10.7% of Watertown's land area. These areas correspond to the R-30 and R-20 zones. Medium density residential areas have an average lot size of 0.94 acres and may require sanitary sewer service and public water service depending on lot size and local soil conditions.

### Village Density Residential

Village density residential uses are found in Oakville and Watertown Center and provide the highest density housing in Watertown. These areas generally correspond to the R-12.5, R-10, and R-G zoning districts and contain a mix of single-family, duplex, three-family, and apartment housing. While village density residential uses comprise just 8.3% of Watertown's total land area, they make up over 40% of all properties and 57% of all dwelling units. With an average lot size of under one-half acre, village density residential areas require sanitary sewer service and public water.

### Commercial

Commercial uses, which include retail, personal services, restaurants, automotive uses, and offices, make up just 1.1% of Watertown's total land area. The low percentage of land devoted to commercial uses means that many residents must travel to neighboring towns and cities in order to shop, receive services, or work. In addition, this puts a larger share of the town's overall property tax burden on residential uses.

### General Commercial

General commercial areas make up 0.7% of the total land area and 65% of commercial land in Watertown and generally align with the B-SC and B-G zones. These areas contain a mix of big box retail, restaurants, personal services, and office uses. General commercial areas are auto oriented, are located along arterial roadways, and contain dedicated surface parking lots. Major general commercial areas include Straits Turnpike and Route 63 between Route 73 and French Street.



*Medium density residential areas are located on the fringes of Oakville and Watertown Center.*



*Village density residential areas contain a mix of single-family and multifamily homes.*



*General commercial areas contain many regional and national chain businesses and are located along Watertown's busiest roadways.*



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### Main Street Commercial

Main Street commercial districts are found in Oakville and Watertown Center and differ from general commercial areas in their age, character, and density. Many of the buildings in Main Street commercial districts predate the automobile. Buildings are placed close to the street and do not have dedicated off-street parking. Similarly, because these areas originally relied on foot traffic, they are located in close proximity to residential areas. While general commercial areas are characterized by single-use buildings, Main Street commercial areas contain mixed-use, multistory buildings. Retail, restaurants, personal services, office, and residential uses are all found in these areas, often within the same building.



*Main Street commercial areas are characterized by street-facing buildings, minimal off-street parking, and proximity to residential neighborhoods*

### Automotive Commercial

Unlike general commercial areas, which contain a variety of commercial uses, automotive commercial areas are dominated by a single type of business – the sale, repair, or service of automobiles. Automotive commercial uses are concentrated along Straits Turnpike south of Bunker Hill Road. A smaller cluster of automotive businesses is found along Route 73 between Route 63 and Riverside Avenue. The clustering of automotive uses near each other is not a phenomenon unique to Watertown. "Auto rows" are found throughout the state as the many automotive uses together become a regional destination, drawing in more customers and benefitting all businesses.



*Automotive uses, including several car dealerships, are concentrated along Straits Turnpike*

### Industrial

Industrial land uses make up 3.1% of Watertown's total land area and include manufacturing facilities, machine shops, warehousing facilities, and distribution centers. Historically, industry located along waterways and rail lines in Watertown Center and Oakville. Many of these buildings still stand although most have transitioned away from manufacturing uses and are now used for warehousing, distribution, office, or retail uses.



*Industrial uses are concentrated in modern industrial parks near the highway system.*

Over the last 50 years, the need for modern one-story factories and the shift from rail to truck transportation have led to industrial development in industrial parks with good access to Route 8.

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Today, a majority of Watertown's industrial uses are located in Watertown Industrial Park on Echo Lake Road and Park Road. Smaller industrial areas are found along Commercial Street and Sylvan Lake Road.

### Institutional

Institutional land includes government buildings, public and private schools, religious institutions, and nonprofit organizations. Institutional uses are concentrated in Watertown Center and Oakville. Institutional uses have been classified into public institutions such as public schools and government offices and private institutions such as private schools, religious institutions, nonprofit organizations, and other tax-exempt uses.

#### Public Institutional

Public institutions make up 163.4 acres accounting for 0.9% of Watertown's total land area. Public schools make up about 102 acres of public institutional land. This land comprises school buildings, parking areas, and athletic facilities. The remaining land is split between other town facilities such as government offices, public works facilities, libraries, and other town services. More information on public facilities can be found in Chapter 5.

#### Private Institutional

Private institutions make up 0.9% of Watertown's total land area. Taft School is by far the largest private institution in Watertown comprising over 100 acres in Watertown Center. Taft School's holdings include its academic campus and athletic facilities as well as several residences. Other private institutions include religious institutions, parochial schools, and nonprofit organizations.

### Open Space

The State of Connecticut has set a goal to preserve 21% of land as protected open space by the year 2023. However, there is no set definition of "open space," and definitions may vary from community to community or even amongst different residents within the same community. The Connecticut DEEP Public Open Space Mapping (POSM) project classifies land as open space if it supports natural-resource-based passive outdoor recreation, forestry and fisheries activities, or other natural resources conservation activities. Uses such as golf courses, cemeteries, and athletic fields are not included in the POSM. Nonetheless, these uses may be perceived as open space by residents.

For the purposes of this plan, open space includes public parks, preserved open space, water utility lands, recreational facilities, golf courses, and cemeteries. Four parcels that are comprised entirely of



*Watertown Public Schools is the largest public landholder in Watertown*



*Taft School in Watertown Center is the largest private institution in town.*

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surface water are also included in this category. Open space such as state and local parks and land trust properties are protected in perpetuity through deed restrictions. Other open space such as golf courses and water utility lands are not protected in perpetuity and may be developed in the future. In addition, many residents may perceive undeveloped land as open space. Open space comprises 21.1% of Watertown's total land area putting them right in line with the state's goal. However, not all of this land is protected in perpetuity, and the town should continue to implement policies that protect land for passive recreation and natural resource conservation.



*The City of Waterbury Bureau of Water owns nearly 700 acres of land surrounding Wigwam Reservoir in northern Watertown.*

### Recreational or Open Space

Recreational or open space land uses refer to areas used as municipal and state parks, state forests, golf courses, athletic fields, land trust properties, and other protected open space. These areas comprise 15.1% of the total land area. The largest tracts of contiguous open space lands are found in northeastern Watertown in Black Rock State Park and Mattatuck State Forest. Parks, recreation, and open space will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 7.

### Water Utility Land

Water utility lands comprise 3.8% of land in Watertown and are found in the northernmost part of town near the borders with Morris, Thomaston, and Bethlehem. Two water utilities own land in Watertown. The largest water utility is the City of Waterbury Bureau of Water, which owns 668 acres of land surrounding Wigwam Reservoir. The Watertown Fire District also has holdings within Watertown. While its primary water supply is in Woodbury, it owns 47 acres of land surrounding Judd Pond in Watertown. Both the City of Waterbury Bureau of Water and Watertown Fire District provide drinking water to Watertown residents.

### Cemetery

Watertown contains four cemeteries totaling 179 acres, or 1% of the total land area. The largest cemetery is Mount Olivet Cemetery, which is over 150 acres in size. Other cemeteries include Old Watertown Cemetery (2.4 acres), Mount James Cemetery (5.8 acres), and Evergreen Cemetery (18.6 acres).

### Undeveloped Land

Undeveloped land includes land that is not developed but is not protected as open space and could be developed in the future. This category includes agricultural lands, forested areas, and other unimproved land. Watertown contains nearly 3,400 acres of undeveloped land comprising 18% of the total land area. Undeveloped lands may be perceived as open space by many community members and contribute to the overall character of the community.



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### Agriculture

Agriculture remains a small but important part of Watertown's economy and physical landscape. As of 2017, there are about 1,847 acres of agricultural land comprising 9.8% of the total land area. Agricultural land is concentrated in southwestern Watertown near the borders with Middlebury and Woodbury. Because agricultural land is already cleared, it is particularly susceptible to being developed. According to land use and land cover data from the University of Connecticut, Watertown lost about 800 acres of agricultural land between 1985 and 2006, most of which was converted into residential land.



*Agricultural land along Route 132 near the Bethlehem town line*

### Undeveloped

Undeveloped land includes unprotected forests and other unimproved lands and makes up 18.0% of Watertown's total land area. Undeveloped land is concentrated in the more rural areas of Watertown although there are also small pieces of undeveloped land within the village centers. Much of the undeveloped land in Watertown contains one or more natural constraints such as steep slopes, wetland soils, or flood zones, which make the land difficult to develop.



*A paper street in the Oakville section of Watertown has become overgrown with vegetation.*

### Other

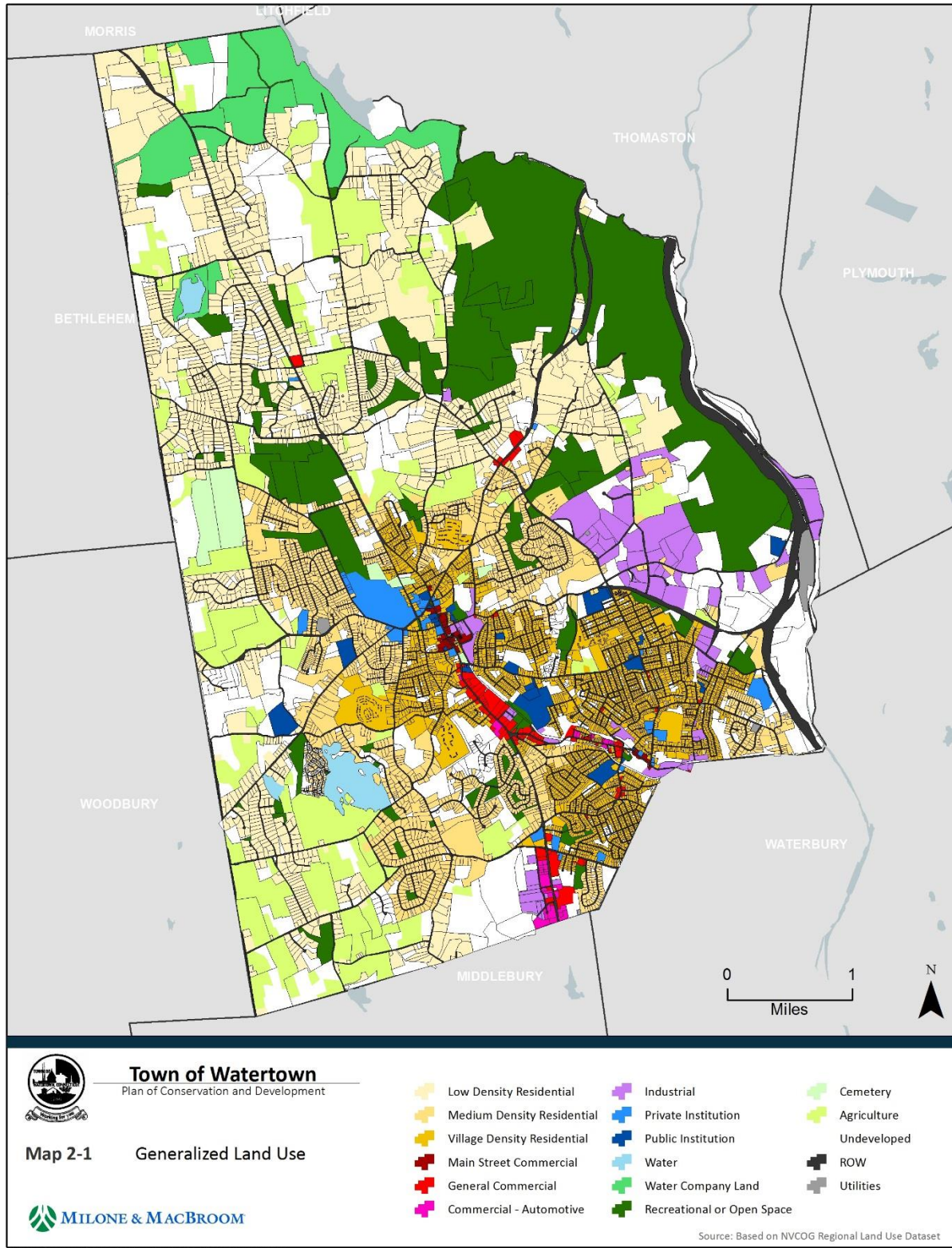
#### Utilities

Utilities encompasses lands that are used for infrastructure such as pump stations, water towers, and electrical substations. Utilities make up about 50 acres of land in Watertown, or 0.3% of the total land area.

#### Right-of-Way

Rights-of-way are used for a variety of critical infrastructure on which Watertown residents rely, including highways, local roads, electrical transmission lines, and railroads. Rights-of-way make up 7.1% of Watertown's total land area. While most right-of-way is used for productive purposes, there are a significant number of unused rights-of-way in Oakville. These rights-of-way, also known as "paper streets," exist on paper but contain no physical infrastructure. Paper streets have both safety and aesthetic impacts on surrounding properties. These areas are often overgrown and can accumulate trash and debris, becoming a detriment to abutting properties. Similarly, paper streets can make it more difficult for public safety responders to access a property as paper streets may show up on road maps but do not exist in reality. Paper streets should be evaluated for their utility and abandoned if necessary.

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Table 2-1 Generalized Land Use

Land Use	Parcels		Land Area (Acres)	
	Count	% of Total	Area	% of Total
<b>Residential</b>	<b>7,424</b>	<b>78.7%</b>	<b>7,182.9</b>	<b>38.1%</b>
Low Density Residential	1,420	15.0%	3,622.6	19.2%
Medium Density Residential	2,130	22.6%	2,006.0	10.7%
Village Density Residential	3,874	41.0%	1,554.3	8.3%
<b>Commercial</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>1.1%</b>
Main Street Commercial	59	0.6%	26.1	0.1%
General Commercial	114	1.2%	129.9	0.7%
Automotive Commercial	39	0.4%	43.0	0.2%
<b>Industrial</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>3.1%</b>
Industrial	90	1.0%	586.1	3.1%
<b>Institutional</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>1.8%</b>
Private Institution	38	0.4%	177.6	0.9%
Public Institution	30	0.3%	163.4	0.9%
<b>Open Space</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>3,894</b>	<b>20.7%</b>
Water	4	0.0%	157.1	0.8%
Water Company Land	10	0.1%	715.4	3.8%
Recreational or Open Space	99	1.0%	2,841.9	15.1%
Cemetery	6	0.1%	179.2	1.0%
<b>Undeveloped Land</b>	<b>1,160</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>5,241</b>	<b>27.8%</b>
Agriculture	103	1.1%	1,846.8	9.8%
Undeveloped	1,057	11.2%	3,394.5	18.0%
<b>Right-of-Way and Utilities</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>1,389</b>	<b>7.4%</b>
Right-of-Way	354	3.8%	1,336.5	7.1%
Utilities	12	0.1%	52.3	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,439</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>18,833</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



### Zoning

The town is under the zoning authority of a seven-member Watertown Planning and Zoning Commission. The Watertown Fire District, located in the center of Watertown, delegated its zoning authority to the Planning and Zoning Commission as of July 1, 2007. The commission has since merged the Fire District regulations into the town regulations. However, several differences remain. The former Fire District contains several distinct zoning districts not found in other parts of Watertown. Similarly, the former Fire District zones use different language and administrative processes compared to the other zones. For example, commercial zones in the former Fire District do not limit the gross floor area of permitted uses while all other commercial zones do. Similarly, the Planning and Zoning Commission should continue to rectify the language and administrative process for the former Fire District zones and should consider eliminating or merging duplicative or related zones.

Watertown contains eight residential zones, eight commercial zones, and four industrial zones. In addition, the town contains four overlay zoning districts, which provide additional regulations supplementing the underlying zones.

### Residential Zones

Residential zones make up 90% of Watertown's total land area. Over three-quarters of Watertown's land is in the three lowest density residential zones: R-90, R-70, and R-30. The primary differences between the eight residential zones are the permitted uses and dimensional standards. All residential zones permit single-family detached dwellings and accessory dwelling units. Two-family dwellings are permitted by right in the R-20, R-10, and R-G zone and by special permit in the R-30 and R-12.5 zone. Three-family dwellings are permitted by right in the R-G zone and by special permit in the R12.5 zone. Finally, multifamily dwellings are only permitted in the R-G zone via special permits.

Besides use, residential zones also have differing dimensional standards such as minimum lot size, coverage, and setback requirements. The rural residential zones (R-90 and R-70) have the largest minimum lot sizes of 90,000 square feet and 70,000 square feet, respectively. For the remaining zones, minimum lot size is dependent on the presence of municipal water service. Properties without municipal water service must have a minimum lot area of 40,000 square feet while minimum lot area decreases to 10,000 to 30,000 square feet if municipal water service is available. Similarly, coverage and setback requirements vary between the low-density and high-density zones. Low-density zones have large setback requirements and low coverage allowances while high-density zones have small setback requirements and higher coverage allowances.

### Commercial Zones

Watertown's eight commercial zones comprise 2.2% of the total land area. The General Business 1 (BG-1) and Shopping Center Business (B-SC) zones are the largest commercial zones, containing 115.5 and 104.1 acres of land, respectively. The remaining commercial zones are much smaller and range from 13.1 acres in the B-G2 zone to 52.3 acres in the Oakville Central Business (B-C) zone. Like residential zones, the eight commercial zones have different dimensional standards and permitted uses. The B-SC zone is primarily made up of "big-box" national chain retailers and auto dealerships. The B-C, Local Business (B-L), and Downtown Business (B-D) zones are comprised mostly of small local businesses and contain a mix of uses, including residences. Two districts, the Office Business (B-O) and Medical and General Business (B-MG) zones, cater primarily to office or medical uses. The final two zones, the

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General Business 1 (BG-1) and General Business 2 (BG-2) zones, permit a mix of retail, service, automotive, and light manufacturing uses.

Given the limited amount of commercially zoned land in Watertown, the town should encourage the redevelopment of areas with nonconforming uses, such as single-family residences. One location where this is prevalent is along Route 73 between Rockdale Avenue and Harvard Street. This area contains numerous single-family homes on small lots. Even if a property owner was interested in redeveloping their site into a commercial use, the lots are too small to fit the required off-street parking. The town should consider modifying the zoning regulations in a manner that encourages property assembly into larger development sites that could support business growth.

### Industrial Zones

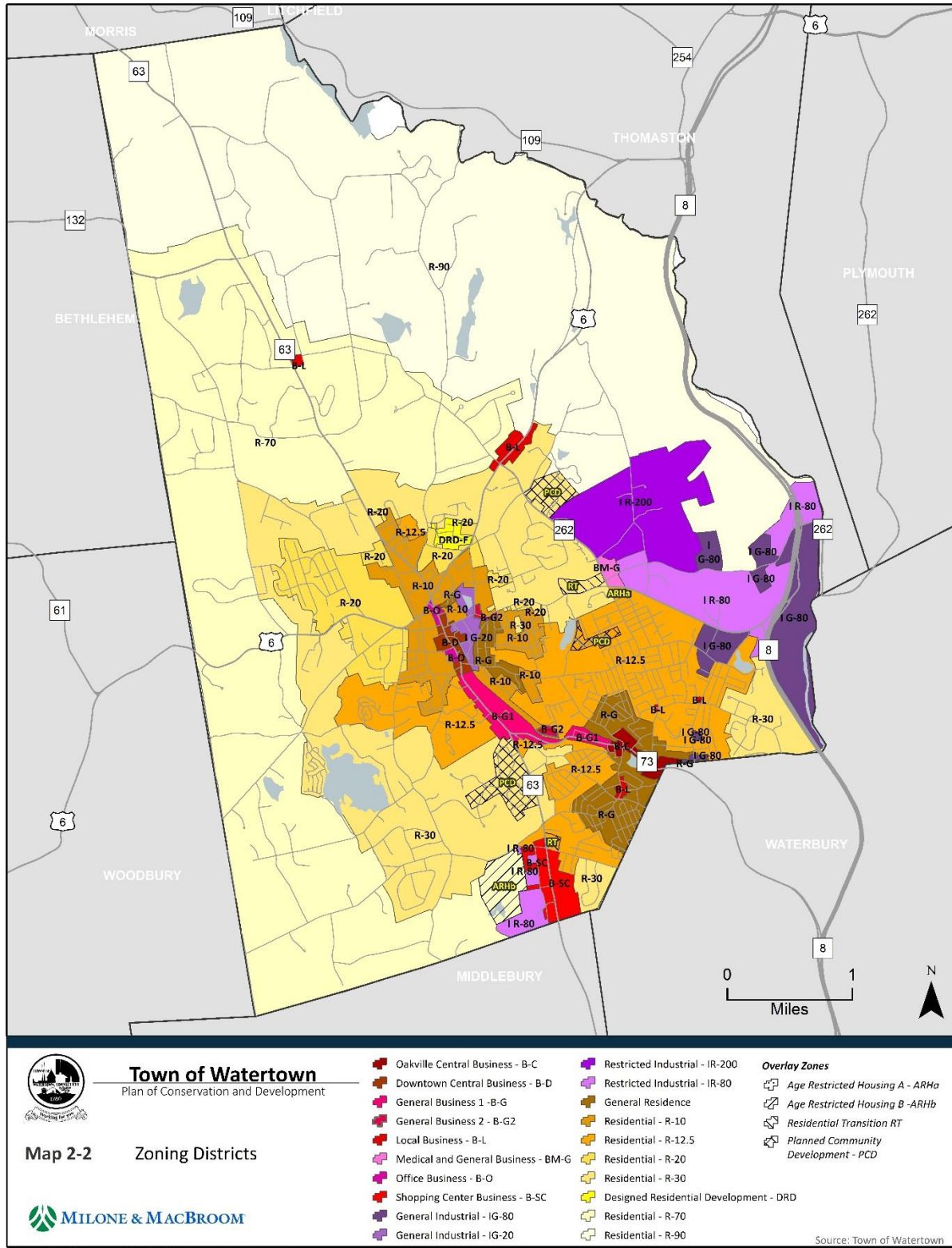
Industrial zones make up 7.9% of Watertown's total land area and are concentrated in industrial parks near the highway system. Watertown's largest industrial area is located between Route 262 and the Naugatuck River and is comprised of over 1,350 acres of land. Smaller industrially zoned areas are found near the Middlebury town line and in Watertown Center. Small industrial parcels are also scattered throughout Oakville's residential neighborhoods. Watertown contains four industrial zones that fall into one of two categories: General Industrial (IG) districts and Restricted Industrial (IR) districts. IG districts are intended to include commercial and industrial uses that are incompatible with residential areas, such as manufacturing, distribution, printing, machine shops, building trades, and office uses. The IR districts are intended to minimize disturbances to abutting residential areas. IR districts have more restrictions on industrial uses and have larger setback requirements compared to IG districts. Most of the land in Watertown's modern industrial parks is in the IR zone.

### Overlay Zones

In addition to traditional zones, Watertown also contains overlay zones that provide an additional layer of regulations in some areas. Watertown currently has four overlay districts mapped. The Residential Transition/Professional Office (RT) Overlay District allows professional office uses while still maintaining the residential character of the area. RT districts are currently mapped on Bunker Hill Road and Echo Lake Road. Watertown has two Age Restricted Housing overlays: ARHa and ARHb. The ARHa overlay is for smaller age-restricted developments of between 4 and 10 acres. It is currently mapped for the Watertown Crossing Development on Booth Avenue. The ARHb overlay is for large developments of between 150 and 200 acres. It is currently mapped for a property on Bunker Hill Road just to the west of the Straits Turnpike commercial area. Finally, Planned Residential Development (PRD) overlay is intended to provide flexibility in design while preserving natural resources. The PRD overlay is mapped in three locations: Reflections at Echo Lake (166 Icehouse Road), the Oak Drive and Kimberly Lane subdivision, and Westview Village on Buckingham Street. In addition, the Zoning Regulations contain an unmapped overlay zone: the Route 262 Planned Commercial District (B-PCD262). This zone is intended to encourage high-quality commercial development in the industrial parks near Route 8.



## Existing Land Use and Zoning



## Existing Land Use and Zoning

Table 2-2 Zoning Districts

Land Use	Area Acres	Percent of Total
<b>Residential Zones</b>	<b>16,950.5</b>	<b>90.0%</b>
Residential - R-10	496.4	2.6%
Residential - R-12.5	1,522.0	8.1%
Residential - R-20	548.9	2.9%
Residential - R-30	2,898.8	15.4%
Residential - R-70	5,055.9	26.8%
Residential - R-90	6,045.3	32.1%
General Residence - R-G	351.5	1.9%
Designed Residential Development - DRD	31.9	0.2%
<b>Commercial Zones</b>	<b>407.2</b>	<b>2.2%</b>
Oakville Central Business - B-C	52.3	0.3%
Downtown Central Business - B-D	38.7	0.2%
General Business 1 - B-G	115.5	0.6%
General Business 2 - B-G2	13.1	0.1%
Local Business - B-L	50.2	0.3%
Medical and General Business - BM-G	20.4	0.1%
Office Business - B-O	13.0	0.1%
Shopping Center Business - B-SC	104.1	0.6%
<b>Industrial Zones</b>	<b>1,482.4</b>	<b>7.9%</b>
General Industrial - IG-20	51.4	0.3%
General Industrial - IG-80	439.5	2.3%
Restricted Industrial - IR-80	480.0	2.5%
Restricted Industrial - IR-200	511.4	2.7%
<b>Total All Zones</b>	<b>18,840.1</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Town of Watertown

Note: Total area for the Zoning differs slightly from total area for land use due to minor differences in town boundaries



### Vacant Commercial and Industrial Land

The development of commercial and industrial lands is important for maintaining the fiscal health of Watertown. In addition to providing jobs for residents, commercial and industrial developments are a significant source of tax revenue for the community and lower the tax burden for residents. One way to examine the potential for future commercial and industrial development is to inventory vacant, developable land zoned for those uses. Currently, Watertown has 664.4 acres of land zoned for commercial or industrial purposes. However, 179.2 acres of vacant land contains environmental constraints such as 100-year flood zones, steep slopes, water bodies, or wetland soils. This leaves 485.1 acres of vacant land available for development. Watertown contains 422 acres of developable industrial land and 63.1 acres of developable commercial land. Developable industrial land is concentrated in the Watertown Industrial Park between Buckingham Street, Route 262, and the Naugatuck River. Developable commercial land is scattered between several sites, including Straits Turnpike, Route 73, and the Route 6 and Route 262 intersection.

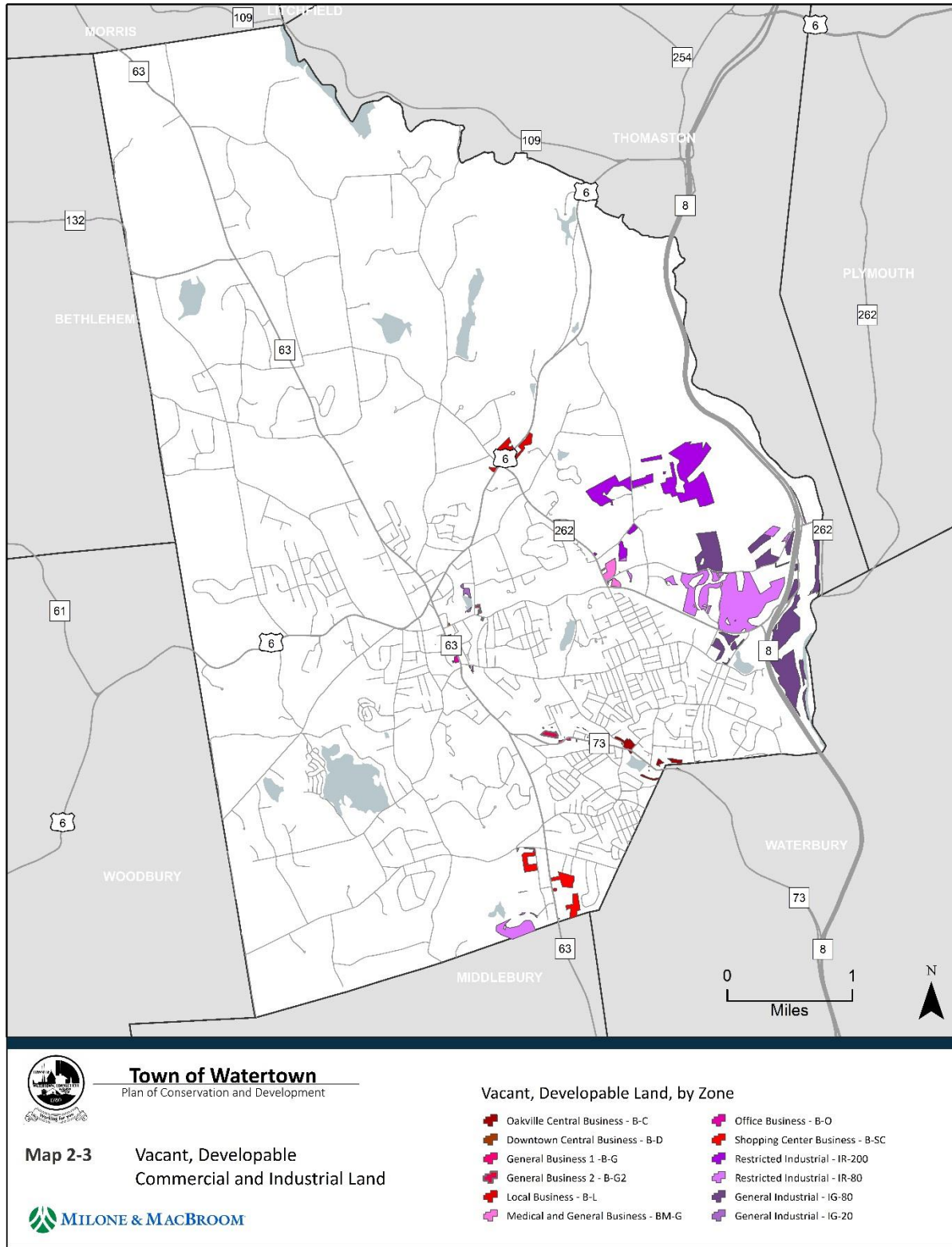
Table 2-3. Vacant Commercial and Industrial Land, by Zone

Land Use	Developable Land	Constrained Land	Total Vacant Land
<b>Commercial Zones</b>	<b>63.1</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>76.3</b>
Oakville Central Business - B-C	8.9	2.2	11.1
Downtown Central Business - B-D	0.7	0.1	0.8
General Business 1 - B-G	0.8	0.3	1.1
General Business 2 - B-G2	3.9	2.0	5.9
Local Business - B-L	14.0	1.7	15.7
Medical and General Business - BM-G	10.1	3.3	13.4
Office Business - B-O	1.1	0.1	1.2
Shopping Center Business - B-SC	23.6	3.5	27.0
<b>Industrial Zones</b>	<b>422.0</b>	<b>166.1</b>	<b>588.1</b>
General Industrial - IG-20	3.0	11.5	14.5
General Industrial - IG-80	148.2	88.8	237.0
Restricted Industrial - IR-80	155.9	47.2	203.0
Restricted Industrial - IR-200	115.0	18.6	133.5
<b>Total All Zones</b>	<b>485.1</b>	<b>179.2</b>	<b>664.4</b>

Source: Town of Watertown

Constrained land includes 100-year flood zones, slopes in excess of 25%, waterbodies, and hydric soils

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## Residential Build-Out

The NVCOG completed a residential buildout analysis for Watertown in 2013. Buildout analyses are useful tools in long-range planning as they allow communities to understand the development potential of land and associated impacts on municipal services if that land were to be developed. As of 2013, Watertown had 4,423 acres of buildable residential land. Buildable residential lands included undeveloped land, agricultural lands, unprotected open spaces, excess land on residential properties (that could be subdivided in the future), and class III water supply lands, which are located outside of public water supply watersheds. Environmentally constrained areas such as wetlands, steep slopes, and water bodies were excluded from the buildable land calculation. About three-quarters of all buildable land is in the R-70 and R-90 zones. These are the two lowest density zones in town.

According to the NVCOG analysis, Watertown could support an additional 3,135 residential dwelling units based on the town's zoning regulations. The areas with the highest potential for new residential units are in the northern and western portions of Watertown covered by the R-30, R-70, and R-90 zones. Undeveloped land has the greatest development potential and could support 1,845 dwelling units. Agricultural land, which is most in danger of being developed since the land is already clear, could support an additional 734 dwelling units. Excess residential land and unprotected open space make up the remainder of Watertown's potential dwelling units.

Table 2-4. Vacant Residential Land and Buildout, by Zone

Land Use	Buildable Residentially Zoned Acres	Potential Future Residential Buildings	Potential Future Dwelling Units
<b>Residential Zones</b>	<b>4,423</b>	<b>2,692</b>	<b>3,151</b>
Residential - R-10 <sup>1</sup>	23	30	67
Residential - R-12.5 <sup>2</sup>	181	225	462
Residential - R-20 <sup>3</sup>	29	28	55
Residential - R-30 <sup>4</sup>	715	791	845
Residential - R-70	1,836	885	959
Residential - R-90	1,623	702	702
General Residence - R-G <sup>5</sup>	16	31	61

Source: Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments - 2013 Residential Buildout Report

1. Includes the former R-10F zone

2. Includes the R-12.5 zone and R-12.5-RT overlay

3. Includes the former R-20F zone

4. Includes the R-30 and R-30F zones and the R-30-PCD and R-30-RT overlay zones

5. Includes the R-G and R-GF zones

Map 2-4

Residential Buildout  
Results: 2013

