

# Executive Summary

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## Dedication

***To the people of Longmeadow***, who value the exceptional quality of life in our town including our safe and open community, residential and historic character, beautiful parks and open spaces, commitment to academic excellence, and outstanding town services.

The Long Range Planning Committee would especially like to thank all the residents and Town officials who have served on the planning subcommittees, attended public forums and met with consultants. Your wide variety of perspectives, questions and ideas, and love of our community have sustained us in our work over three years, and we hereby present *Longmeadow Faces the Future, the Longmeadow Long Range Plan* to you.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Sommer, Chairperson	(2000-2004)
David Appleman	(2000-2004)
Philip N. Clark	(2000-2004)
Russell Dale	(2001-2004)
Saul Finestone	(2000-2004)
Elizabeth Foote	(2000-2002)
Paula Gallup	(2000-2004)
Thomas Herrala	(2000-2004)
William Hoff	(2000-2004)
Carol A. Leary	(2000-2004)
Richard Marchese	(2000-2004)
Arlene Miller	(2000-2004)
Gerard Nolet <i>ex-officio</i>	(2000-2003)
John Papale <i>ex-officio</i>	(2003-2004)
Mark Schneider	(2000-2004)
Paula Tredeau	(2000-2004)

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## Executive Summary

### **“Longmeadow is happy being Longmeadow”**

“Longmeadow is happy being Longmeadow,” said a consultant early in the planning process after over 120 residents and town officials had looked at our community’s strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats. The challenge for the Long Range Planning Committee has been to develop recommendations that will preserve the exceptional quality of life in our town through good and bad economic cycles, knowing that maintaining our public infrastructure and quality workforce is costly, there are few opportunities for growth, and that meeting the needs of our youth and elders is an emerging issue.



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## Longmeadow Vision Statement

Longmeadow is a community where people value home and family, and the town services and institutions that support this way of life. Longmeadow residents have pride in the historic beauty of our small New England town and want to preserve our residential character. People want well maintained homes, a safe community, tree-lined and well-lit streets and sidewalks, parks and open space close to where people live, and small commercial centers compatible with surrounding neighborhoods. Residents care about our children and are concerned about providing high-quality public education and youth recreation opportunities. Residents care about our elders and want to plan for enough affordable housing for our aging population and for access to the services and programs elders need to live either independently or with assistance. Longmeadow people value the exceptional quality of life in our community. There is a strong consensus to maintain and improve what we already have, both today and in the future.



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## The Planning Process

The Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) was formed in May, 2000, when the Board of Selectmen appointed 15 citizens to develop a long range plan for Longmeadow to guide the Town's physical development and provision of municipal services. The planning process has included town residents, town officials, and consultants. Three subcommittees, made up of LRPC members and other interested citizens, have studied and made recommendations in three subject areas: Land Use and Conservation; Quality of Life; and, Town Services and Facilities. Consultants Mullin Associates conducted visioning work with town officials and at the Longmeadow Forum of 120 citizens in February, 2001. The team of Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB), RKG Associates, Inc. (RKG), and Walter Cudnohufsky

Associates prepared the draft vision framework plan. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission did the transportation planning. RKG did the financial analysis and housing and economic development planning. The LRPC created the Town Services and Facilities recommendations based on the report of that subcommittee. VHB prepared the final plan with GIS maps.



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## **Funding**

This project was funded with \$30,000 of Town funds and \$30,000 in consulting services from the Commonwealth's Community Development Planning Program under Executive Order 418. Countless hours of volunteer labor by the LRPC and its subcommittees have also gone into preparing this plan.

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## **Recommendation Highlights**

The Longmeadow Long Range Plan is comprised of five elements: Environmental and Resource Protection; Town Services and Community Life; Housing; Economic Development; and, Transportation. The following sections summarize the recommendations of the LRPC and the three subcommittees, which form the basis of the Long Range Plan implementation schedule.



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## **Environmental and Resource Protection**

We must take bold steps in order to respond to the demands for housing, open space protection and historic preservation while at the same time to create revenue generating solutions for the Town. Most land in Town is already developed, with 74.1 percent in residential use, 0.8 percent in commercial use, 2 percent for highways and 23.1 percent in agricultural or open space. The Town is the largest landowner of open space in Longmeadow.

### **Revenue/Cost Analysis**

According to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Longmeadow is approximately 90 percent built-out. Because of the limited amount of land in Longmeadow available for future development, all requests for development or rezoning must be evaluated on the potential to generate income or in terms of costs to the Town, as well as on the merits of the land use and regulatory issues.

## **Open Space**

To the extent possible, lands that are currently conservation or recreation lands should stay as open space. Efforts should be made to use these lands for passive recreation and outdoor educational opportunities and to inform citizens of Longmeadow about them.

### **The Meadows/Fannie Stebbins**

- Support the Conservation Commission's ongoing efforts to acquire riverfront and floodplain land in order to preserve open space, maintain the natural state of wetlands, the floodplain and other environmentally critical areas, and to provide opportunities for passive recreational use.
- The Conservation Commission and Parks Department should work toward developing passive recreational activities on environmentally sensitive land, including a trail system and educational stations.
- The LRPC recommends the development and maintenance of farming activities, and the development of a forestry management program in conjunction with state and federal programs.
- Ensure the protection of the Fannie Stebbins Wildlife Refuge through establishment of a conservation restriction, zoning action or other appropriate control to help the sanctuary secure the land and protect it from future development.

### **The Riverfront**

The LRPC supports development of a riverfront park on Town owned land (200/216 Anthony Road), including picnic tables, a swing set and a parking area. Public access to the water should be limited to non-motorized craft, due to the shallow depth and environmentally sensitive nature of the area. Planning and development should include close cooperation and coordination with riverfront residents and the Pioneer Valley Yacht Club.

### **Parks**

The LRPC recommends that the Parks and Recreation Department work with the Conservation Commission and other Town boards to update the Parks Master Plan. Bliss, Laurel, Turner and Greenwood Parks should remain as park land. Development of a community center serving elders and teens should be considered for the Greenwood Center area. The LRPC considered conversion of the recreation area at Wolf Swamp fields to senior housing or a flex tech facility, but potential benefits were not large enough to warrant the relocation of the fields and parking. Development of a bike path system linking recreation and park areas around town and with the Springfield bikeway is desirable.

### **Historic Preservation**

The LRPC supports the activities of both the Historic District Commission and the Historical Society in their mission to maintain the architectural characteristics of the Historic District and to foster interest in the Town's past. We recognize the Longmeadow Town Green-- the Historic District-- as a living museum and support efforts for its preservation, and for preserving other historic structures in our town. We should examine zoning bylaws and Historic District Commission mandates to ensure that any renovations are carefully planned and closely monitored. Consider requiring permits from the Zoning Board of Appeals or a moratorium on a town-wide basis for tear-downs. Because of the trend toward mansionization, the Planning Board should study and propose a square foot to area ratio (SAR) zoning bylaw for the entire town. This would also help to preserve the character of the Historic District.

### **Golf Courses**

In the event that a large tract of privately held open space becomes available, we recommend that the Town consider bonding or other funding mechanisms for purchase. Projected uses include recreation, housing, mixed-use office, commercial, light industrial or any combination that would generate net revenues for the town tax base while conforming to the character of the town.



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## **Town Services and Community Life**

Longmeadow residents enjoy excellent town services, but they are concerned about maintaining these services as revenues decline. They also would like better communications between town officials and citizens. People want better facilities and programs to meet the needs of our elders and youth, and have expressed interest in creating a community center to do this.

### **Create Financial Stability / Budgeting**

- Stress to our elected Boards, as well as our residents, the need to lobby our State Representative and State Senator regarding the need to support Local Aid appropriations, based on fair distribution formulas, including the return of 100 percent of lottery money to municipalities.
- Analyze the costs of unfunded mandates such as Special Education and examine options for management and political action.
- The Appropriations Committee, Board of Selectmen and School Committee should develop, and agree on, a policy for the Town regarding what conditions would “trigger” an override recommendation and vote.
- Adopt a town-wide policy freezing all budgetary line item descriptions to enhance year-to-year comparisons of departmental operations.
- Review town budgetary documents to consider alternative formats that might enhance resident understanding of the Town's finances.

### **Increase the Financial Base**

- Study the creation of a “Community Chest” or “Endowment Fund”, seeking donations from residents to support town operations.
- Review the Town’s fees and fines structure.
- Study the advisability/desirability of altering zoning bylaws to permit alternate housing situations and increased density.
- Encourage “New Growth” by supporting additions/renovations of the existing housing stock, coupled with reassessment of such properties.
- Conduct real estate evaluations in a timely manner as required by law to ensure that assessments are accurate.
- Explore the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act of 2000 as a source of funding for historic preservation, housing and conservation land acquisition, subject to voter approval. This revenue is not subject to Proposition 2 ½ limitations and would be eligible for matching funds from the State.

### **Improve Capital Infrastructure**

In the next decade, the Town will need to make significant capital improvements to Longmeadow High School, Glenbrook and Williams Middle Schools, and the Town Yard, and make our municipal facilities fully accessible to people with disabilities. There is interest in building a community center to serve elders and teens.

- Continue to support and improve the process conducted by the Capital Planning Committee. Evaluate and look at other models to improve the process.
- Identify and pursue all grants which might support the acquisition of needed equipment. Chief among these would be the School Department and the Police and Fire Departments, i.e. Homeland Security issues.
- Increase annual budgetary support to fund capital improvements and acquisitions.
- Review options to relocate town offices to a single ADA compliant facility.
- Create a study group to explore the construction of a new community center at Greenwood or another appropriate location. Consider locating affordable senior housing adjacent to the facility.

### **Maintain High Academic Excellence**

- Once the new Superintendent of Schools is chosen, a thorough review of school goals and operations should take place, with recommendations on how to maintain excellence at a level of local spending the townspeople will support.
- Ensure the High School does not lose its accreditation by bringing physical conditions up to state standards. Develop initiatives to provide better equipment and upgrade technological resources for students.
- Support the Longmeadow Educational Excellence Foundation (LEEF), PTOs and other organizations working to enhance our schools.

## **Improve Town Management and Efficiency**

- Study departmental relationships and interdependencies to determine if further departmental consolidations or cross training of staff can be undertaken to achieve efficiencies.
- Study the need for a Chief Financial Officer for the Town, including consolidation of the Collector/Treasurer functions, the Town Accountant and the Director of Business Services.
- Study the role of the IT Department throughout the Town, including the School Department. Study those uses to which technology can be applied to further reduce operating expenses, such as centralized information tracking, online registrations or routine bill paying.
- Support the proposed Charter. If the vote fails, support Bylaw changes to improve the efficiency of Town government, including, but not limited to the appointment (rather than the election) of the Water & Sewer Commission, Parks & Recreation Commission, Town Clerk, and Town Collector/Treasurer.
- Elected Boards and Town Officials need to actively support the work of the Charter Commission, publicize its findings and support the public debate of its recommendations.

## **Improve Communications**

- Study the usefulness and costs of a community-wide newsletter.
- Utilize web-based meeting minutes, meeting notices, contract documents, departmental plans, etc. to share information on a wider basis than might currently be done. A study to evaluate the advisability of consolidating Town and School Department websites should be included.
- Develop a plan for more intensive, consistent and improved use of Longmeadow Cable Television by Boards, elected officials and department heads to inform residents and disseminate decisions and plans.
- Encourage elected officials and Boards to better utilize available public relations/media vehicles.
- Distribute a survey to town residents to evaluate needs and provision of services. Explore the possibility of including non-binding questions on ballots, or filling out a survey on Election Day.

## **Develop and Pursue Collaborative Relationships**

- Collaborate with Bay Path College and other non-profit institutions on town service usage and demands, support and planning for town functions and services, and other opportunities
- Collaborate with neighboring municipalities on sharing of services where appropriate, joint ventures utilizing the model of the Scantic Valley Health Trust, traffic issues and mutual aid and support agreements for public safety issues.
- Explore the use of grants or partnerships with State, Federal and private agencies for development of park, recreation and conservation lands.

### **Focus on the Needs of Youth and Seniors**

- Address youth issues, including lack of teen job opportunities and public transportation.
- Address senior issues such as affordable housing, educational opportunities, and a new senior center.
- Promote opportunities for multi-generational activities and volunteering.



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## **Housing**

The analysis of housing data shows a need and a market for affordable housing in Longmeadow. Town residents want more affordable housing options for seniors. The LRPC supports creative zoning that would allow for alternate types of housing, such as accessory apartments, housing above commercial buildings, and expansion of existing elderly housing.

### **Senior Housing**

The town should explore various properties in the town for the development of housing that provides opportunities for a diversity of income levels, including affordable housing for seniors. Parcels to be studied include the Water Tower property, Wolf Swamp fields, Greenwood Center, and others that may be identified.

The Water Tower property, owned by the School and Recreation Departments was explored as the site for the development of age-restricted housing. The VHB financial projections show that sale of this property for that purpose could result in a substantial one time payment to the Town (\$11.8 million), and significant increases in property taxes (up to \$1.4 million per year). This project has enough of a financial benefit to the town to be seriously considered. Other options for smaller units of senior housing could be located as an expansion of Emerson Manor, the Bliss Road/Williams Street commercial area, Bay Path College, or Greenwood Center.

### **Accessory Apartment Bylaw**

The Town should revisit the issue of allowing accessory apartments on premises of owner occupied homes. This would create some units of affordable housing for renters, help homeowners receive some income to offset tax increases, and increase safety for elderly homeowners who live alone. A carefully crafted bylaw will protect neighborhood appearance and would have no negative impact on property values.

### **Longmeadow Street Overlay Zone**

In the future, if large houses on Longmeadow Street no longer prove desirable for single family residences, and either do not sell as residences or begin to fall into disrepair, the Town may wish to consider an overlay zone with strict design guidelines to permit some homes to be converted into professional offices, bed & breakfasts, or condominiums. Creative site and design review would preserve the historic character of the area.



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## **Economic Development**

Longmeadow was conceived as a residential suburb of Springfield in the 1920's and has maintained this character ever since. Residents have consistently voted against large commercial development, choosing to rely on their property taxes as the primary source for local revenues. Because opportunities for economic development in town are so limited, Town officials should look favorably on proposals which would generate ongoing revenues to the town. Ultimately, the solutions to Longmeadow's need to produce more revenue to support town services are political. At the state level, citizens could work to amend Proposition 2 ½, change school funding formulas, insist that mandates are fully funded, or support increases in taxes, such as the automobile excise tax, which return significant revenues to the town.

### **Increasing Density of Commercial Areas**

The LRPC recommends increasing density in existing commercial areas rather than developing new commercial districts. This would require changing the height restriction on commercial buildings to accommodate increased density. Also, parking ratios of spaces per square foot should be eased in order to accommodate the size of the building.

### **Longmeadow Street Overlay Zone**

(See previous description under Housing)

### **Economic Impact of Non-Profits**

The town should be cognizant of the economic impact of non-profits and explore:

- An exchange of in-kind services or sharing resources with non-profits;
- Opening a dialog to seek ways for non-profit institutions to assist with sharing municipal service costs in an equitable manner; and
- Monitoring land acquisitions by any tax exempt organization, except when the land is acquired for conservation or the preservation of open space.

We should promote opportunities for partnerships with Bay Path College. Possible areas include: library services/funding, elderly housing, joint recreation facilities, performing arts, educational and training opportunities, school-college partnerships and general use of facilities.



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## Transportation

Residents' transportation concerns are primarily about pedestrian and bicycle safety at many places around town, excessive speeding on Converse Street and other locations, and traffic delays at rush hours, particularly on Longmeadow Street. School traffic and student safety is also a particular concern.

### Traffic Delays

The solution to Longmeadow's traffic delays would have to begin with a regional approach coordinated by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, because much of the traffic is due to drivers from other towns passing through Longmeadow.

### Bliss Williams Commercial Area

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission prepared a detailed study of the Bliss Road/Williams Street commercial area, looking at existing traffic conditions and projections of traffic conditions for two commercial expansion scenarios. The LRPC recommends modest changes in signage and turning lanes and a new crosswalk at Bliss Court to improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety.

### Speeding

The town could consider the use of speed bumps, traffic signals, warning devices, more frequent law enforcement, and other measures in areas where speeding is a problem.

### Route 5 Corridor

The Route 5 Corridor from Forest Glen Road to Williams Street experiences delay and severe congestion in the morning and evening peak travel hours, resulting from heavy volumes of traffic traveling through this location. This roadway provides direct access to East Longmeadow, Springfield, Enfield, Connecticut and I-91. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) is performing an analysis of existing conditions as well as forecasted future conditions, including examining timing and phasing plans for signals located throughout the corridor, to propose recommendations to improve traffic flow and increase safety. PVPC will be working with the Town to identify additional concerns and safety hazards located along Route 5 in the center of Town. The Route 5 –Longmeadow Corridor Study will provide short term, low cost alternatives as well as long term strategies to alleviate traffic congestion and improve safety conditions.