

# Municipal Services & Facilities

## Municipal Services and Facilities

### Staff and Budget:

90 Full-time Employees

120 Part-time or On-Call  
Personnel

\$26m operating budget

\$32m overall budget

### Tax Levy:

\$1.15b in total value

\$22.5m in tax revenues

35% of total Budget

### Town-Owned Facilities:

- Town Hall
- Police Station
- Fire Department
- DPW Complex
- Transfer Station
- Public Library
- Council on Aging  
Senior Center
- Pirone Park
- Sandy Pond Beach
- Dog Park

### Future Needs:

DPW Operations Center

& Equipment Garage

Elementary School

Community/Senior Center

Storage, meeting, and office  
space

Farmers Market Location

Neighborhood Parks

## Introduction

Incorporated in 1871, The Town of Ayer is governed by a combination of general bylaws, special legislative acts, and local bylaws. These regulations encompass a range of mandates such as the quality of the public drinking water supply, what can be built and where, health and sanitation requirements, and define the decision-making authority on how to spend local tax revenues. Like many small communities in Massachusetts, the Town of Ayer does not operate under a “Home Rule” charter adopted under Article 89 of the Massachusetts General Laws, which formally defines the powers, functions, and procedures of the local government. Instead, the Board of Selectmen (BOS) serve as the Chief Elected Officers, while the Town Administrator position has been increasingly evolving to perform many of the executive duties of the local government with respect to purchasing, personnel, and budget as is typical of a Town Manager. At Special Fall Town Meeting in 2017, the Town Administrator position was restructured into a Town Manager position that is appointed for three-year terms by the BOS. The consolidation of executive functions authorizes the Town Manager to hire and fire department heads, serve as the Chief Procurement Officer and enter into contracts, administer all personnel policies and collective bargaining agreements, and allow for the coordination of all Town agencies within one department among other duties. In addition to the BOS and Town Manager, the Town is served by 32 elected or appointed boards, commissions, committees. These bodies have the authority to set policy, review projects or proposals, and make recommendations for funding. Due to chronic vacancies on some boards (for example the Commission on Disabilities), and an overall board vacancy rate of approximately 12 percent, many elected board and commission positions are transitioning into appointed positions.

Many of the Town’s executive functions are performed by departments within the Town Hall. Various aspects of the Town’s finances are overseen by the Assessor’s Department, which is charged with determining local tax valuations, Benefits and Payroll, which manages Town employee compensation, and the Tax Collector and Treasurer, which were recently consolidated into a single appointed position responsible for collecting and processing bills and payments. In addition to these positions, the Town Hall also houses the Information Technology Department, which is tasked with maintaining the Town’s IT systems, website, and social media, as well as protecting the Town’s electronic data from cyberattack. The



Building Department and Department of Planning and Community Development also operate within the Town Hall. These departments serve as staff to the Planning Board and Conservation Commission, oversee all land and community development activities within the Town, work to provide safe and affordable housing opportunities, and work to retain and attract local businesses and provide resources for workforce development. Finally, the Town Hall also houses the Recreation Department. The Recreation Department is served by one full time staff member and individual recreation programs and overseen by one of the five members of the Recreation Commission.

In addition to its executive functions, the Town also performs public safety functions through the police, fire, ambulance, health and human services, and public works departments. The Council on Aging serves approximately 1,200 seniors every year and provides transportation services, financial counseling, health screenings, recreation, and other services to ensure Ayer's seniors and disabled residents are adequately served. The Police Department is staffed by 32 officers, patrolmen, prisoner watch personnel, and dispatchers. The Fire Department is staffed by 43 firefighters, dispatchers, and emergency medical technicians and paramedics. Ayer's Police, Fire and Ambulance crews respond to nearly 20,000 calls annually. The Department of Public Works (DPW) oversees the transfer station, streets and sidewalks, and operates and maintains the public water, storm water, and wastewater systems. The Board of Health is a three-member board, with the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health functioning as the Health Agent. The Board of Health issues permits, operates flu and rabies clinics, oversees mosquito and tick control, issues updates regarding Plow Shop Pond, disseminates public health information, and assists residents with disposal of hazardous materials, medications, and needles.

Finally, the Ayer-Shirley Regional School District provides educational, arts, athletic, recreational, and enrichment programming for youths in Ayer and Shirley. The school district was regionalized in 2011 and with over 1,750 students enrolled, is at its highest enrollment since the closure of Fort Devens. The school system consists of four schools, of which the Page-Hilltop Elementary School and the Ayer-Shirley Regional High School are located in Ayer, and the Lura A. White Elementary School and Ayer-Shirley Regional Middle School are located in Shirley. The district employs approximately 140 teachers with average class sizes of approximately 20 students.<sup>1</sup> The school district is overseen by the Superintendent of Schools and the Regional School Committee. The Regional School Committee consists of six elected members, with three members representing Ayer and three members representing Shirley.

### **Municipal Services and Facilities Goals:**

1. Address municipal facilities needs for recreation and social services programming, an improved senior center, and adequate storage and meeting space.
2. Recruit and increase civic involvement on local boards, commissions, and committees to improve civic engagement, expand institutional knowledge and memory, and address succession planning issues as current staff and volunteers approach retirement.
3. Increase the Town's ability to efficiently and effectively manage Ayer's services and facilities in a fiscally sustainable and environmentally responsible manner to encourage a high quality of life for residents and an attractive environment in which businesses can prosper.

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Department of Education, 2017.



## Municipal Budget

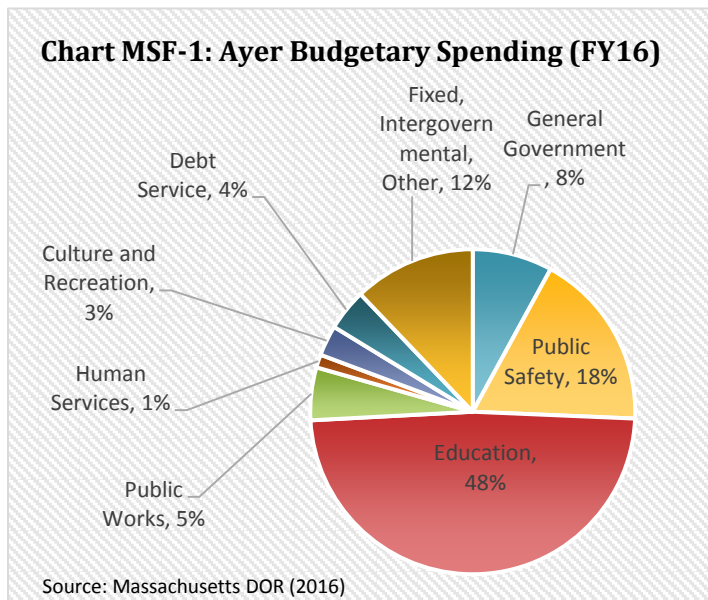
### Budget Process

The Town's ability to provide municipal services and facilities is dependent upon the budgetary process. Every year, the Town undergoes a budgetary process that generally occurs in six stages: 1) Planning – during this period, the Town's Accounting Department estimates necessary expenditures (fixed costs such as debt service, insurance, contractual agreements, etc.) and revenues (based on prior year revenues, year to date collections, etc.), as well as the impacts of any known changes (such as to rates, debt exclusions or overrides, and fee increases) to determine the funds available for operating costs and other discretionary funding. 2) Departmental Spending – following the determination of funds available, The BOS and Finance Committee establish guidelines for departmental spending and forms are distributed to department heads for funding requests. 3) Review – the budget requests are then reviewed by the Finance Committee. The reviews are based on descriptions of specific projects covered under the department's budget request, as well as how the spending relates to the overall goals and objectives of the Town. 4) Approval – Following budget reviews and negotiations, the budget is then presented at Town Meeting by the Finance Committee for approval. A quorum is required at Town Meeting to approve the budget on annual basis, and then Town cannot legally operate without a budget.

In addition to the budget process, the Town must also undergo a related, but longer term financial planning process to develop an annual Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The CIP is used to address major costs that have multi-year impacts on municipal finance. A capital investment is usually a larger expense such as a building, fire engine, infrastructure improvement, or other item that has an economic life that lasts several years. The CIP process seeks to identify, prioritize, and schedule for acquisition future capital funding needs and the final CIP plan is approved by the Planning Board on annual basis.

## Local Budget

### Expenditures



The Town of Ayer has an annual operating budget of approximately \$26 million and employs 90 full-time personnel, and an additional 120 part-time or on-call personnel as well as compensated elected officials. As of 2016 (the last fiscal year for which comparison revenue and expenditure data was available), education comprises approximately half of municipal expenses, while public safety receives about one fifth of the budget.

Total expenditures increased by 16% between 2007 and 2016 (**Table MSF-1**). Although the town spent more for services in all departments, the total amount of spending required for debt service and fixed costs declined during the same time

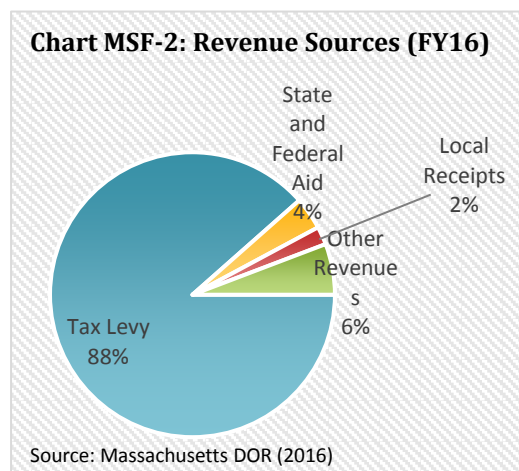
period representing a reduction in long term expenses and sound fiscal management. The greatest spending increases were for public safety, in particular Fire and Other Public Safety, and Culture and Recreation.



Table MSF-1, Expenditures					
	FY2007	FY2016	2016 share of budget	10 year change 2007-2016 (\$)	10 year change 2007-2016 (%)
General Government	1,399,635	1,892,042	8%	492,407	35%
Public Safety	2,773,921	4,210,550	18%	1,436,629	52%
Police	1,532,322	2,012,208	8%	479,886	31%
Fire	1,178,481	2,054,828	9%	876,347	74%
Other Public Safety	63,118	143,514	1%	80,396	127%
Education	9,310,413	11,524,739	48%	2,214,326	24%
Public Works	877,063	1,247,384	5%	370,321	42%
Human Services	181,565	308,551	1%	126,986	70%
Culture and Recreation	540,638	721,984	3%	181,346	34%
Debt Service	1,576,752	981,766	4%	-594,986	-38%
Fixed, Intergovernmental, Other	3,870,916	2,883,779	12%	-987,137	-26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,530,903</b>	<b>23,770,795</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3,239,892</b>	<b>16%</b>

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Municipal Databank (2017)

## Revenue



All revenue received or collected by the Town of Ayer from any source and by any department, belongs to a common pool referred to as the *general fund*. The general fund is used to fund the majority of Town services and facilities, including the maintenance of public buildings, managing the public payroll, benefits, insurance, contracts, equipment, and so on; however, other funds may also exist, such as trust funds for affordable housing, open space, or other community benefits. The majority of general fund revenue in most communities comes from municipal property taxes, as well as some contributions from state and federal aid, local receipts (such as motor vehicle excise tax, meals taxes, and other such local taxes authorized by the Massachusetts

Department of Revenue), and other revenue sources which may include grants, donations, and proceeds from investment accounts like local enterprise funds. State and federal aid tends to include funding for schools, school buildings, public roadways, utilities, open space, water quality, and other complex funding issues. Generally, the more outside aid a community receives, the less reliant they are on the *local tax levy* to fund local activities. In Ayer, state and federal aid and other sources of revenue contributed just 10 percent of the General Fund in 2016. The local tax levy is comprised of commercial, industrial, and personal (CIP) and residential property taxes.

As shown in **Table MSF-2**, reliance on property taxes and local receipts has increased significantly over the past decade. Most notably state and federal aid decreased by 83 percent between 2007 and 2016. Much of this decrease may be due to the change to a regional school district, which altered the previous local funding formula. Since 2012, the first fiscal year under the current school structure, Ayer has seen a 26 percent decline in state and federal aid. This decrease has been mitigated by an increase in all of the other sources of general fund revenue, in particular the tax levy and other revenue sources (which includes revenue from other governments, transfers, miscellaneous, and other financing sources). These increases in other revenues are a



reflection of the extreme dedication on behalf of the Town's leadership, staff, and volunteers to control costs, provide local services and facilities at a level that sustains and increases the value of the tax base, and to find every available funding opportunity to offset local costs.

<b>Table MSF-2, General Fund Revenue, 2007-2016</b>							
	2007	2012	2016	10 year change 2007-2016	10 year change %	4 year change 2012-2016	4 year change %
Tax Levy	14,673,364	22,497,010	22,497,010	22,497,010	53%	3,514,723	19%
State & Federal Aid	5,594,424	936,038	936,038	936,038	-83%	-225,324	-19%
Local Receipts	390,979	523,011	523,011	523,011	34%	108,074	26%
Other Revenues	894,988	1,469,292	1,469,292	1,469,291	64%	581,800	66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,553,755</b>	<b>25,425,351</b>	<b>25,425,351</b>	<b>25,425,351</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>3,979,273</b>	<b>19%</b>

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Municipal Databank

### Regional Comparison

<b>Table MSF-3, Municipal Revenue Comparison (FY16)</b>				
	Total Budget	Tax Levy % of Budget	State Aid % of Budget	2016 Average Single Family Tax Bill
Ayer	32,494,284	65.5	2.7	\$4,089
Clinton	46,283,751	48.5	34.7	\$3,944
Hudson	78,968,856	58.5	18.5	\$5,447
Littleton	46,936,136	68.9	11.1	\$6,999
Maynard	46,291,010	61.3	15.7	\$6,960
Pepperell	28,217,288	65.2	5.7	\$4,638
Shirley	15,718,124	63.6	8.9	\$4,525

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Municipal Databank

As shown in **Table MSF-4**, Ayer receives relatively little state aid, but remains relatively less reliant on the local tax levy and expensive local property taxes relative to the size of its overall budget to maintain budget levels than similar communities. Ayer has an Aa2 bond rating, which is the second highest bond rating, and rates Ayer's

credit worthiness when the Town needs to borrow. The ability to borrow is occasionally required to meet budgetary needs, particularly for capital expenses.

<b>Table MSF-4, Regional Commercial Tax Rate Comparison</b>						
	Total valuation 2018	% CIP Assessed Valuation	CIP Tax Rate 2018	CIP as % of Res Tax Rate 2018	CIP Growth 2009-2018	Residential Growth 2009-2018
Ayer	1,153,576,260	34%	31.0	2.15	17%	16%
Clinton	1,311,656,461	18%	30.73	1.81	54%	2%
Devens	277,581,200	84%	22.64	1.39	23%	43%
Hudson	2,576,517,300	15%	35.18	2.01	-16%	6%
Littleton	1,807,036,759	22%	28.03	1.55	51%	18%
Maynard	1,289,112,607	11%	31.10	1.37	-24%	-1%
Pepperell	1,250,607,586	6%	16.39	1	13%	-1%
Shirley	662,192,209	12%	16.42	1	12%	0%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Municipal Databank

As shown in **Table MSF-4**, Ayer is heavily dependent on commercial property taxes, which contributes 53 percent of the total tax levy. This is due in part to a relatively high proportion of commercial property, which comprises 34 percent of total assessed valuation. Of comparison communities, only Devens has a higher proportion of commercial valuation, at 84 percent of its tax base. Like most of the comparison communities,



Ayer has a split tax rate, applying a higher tax rate for commercial property than for residential property. Commercial properties in Ayer pay more than twice the rate as residential properties, which is higher than comparable communities. Significantly, Ayer's commercial tax rate is substantially higher than Devens, which can provide significant competition when recruiting new businesses to Ayer. The value of Ayer's commercial property grew by 17 percent over the past decade, on par with residential growth.

Ayer's split tax rate has been the subject of debate for a number of years. The higher tax rates for commercial, industrial, and personal property has been linked with a long tradition of Ayer attracting high impact commercial users who are willing to pay higher taxes in Ayer because Ayer is willing to accept their potential impacts in exchange for higher tax revenues. However, not all businesses in Ayer are high impact businesses. There are many small and local businesses in Ayer that struggle to pay their taxes and are discouraged in investing in their properties. However, reduce the commercial tax rate would require increasing the residential tax rate to offset lost revenue. **Table MSF-5** shows what the impact would be of leveling the tax rates so that residential properties pay a more proportional share of property taxes. Eliminating the rate split so that commercial and residential properties pay the same property tax rate would result in a blended property tax rate of \$20.13 per \$1,000 of assessed value. This rate would reduce the commercial rate by one third, while raising the residential rate by approximately \$6 per mil. Consequently, the average single-family tax bill would increase by \$1,784, which would be significant to local voters. Reducing the split rate so that the commercial tax rate is more competitive with Devens and offering a small business exemption would have a more moderate impact on residential tax bills than eliminating the split tax rate entirely.

**Table MSF-5, Ayer Tax Rates: Actual 2018 Split Rate versus Alternative Rates**

	Residential rate (per \$1,000)	CIP rate (per \$1,000)	Average Single Family tax bill	Difference from current average SF tax bill
Current Split Rate (Actual)	14.43	31.00	\$4,514	
Blended Rate (No Split)	20.13	20.13	\$6,298	\$1,784
Competitive Rate (Reduced Split)	17.58	25.00	\$5,499	\$985

Source: Community Opportunities Group, Inc., based on Massachusetts Department of Revenue 2018 tax rates, tax levy, and assessed valuation by class

## Municipal Services

### Town Hall

The day to day activities of the Town are overseen by the Town Manager, with oversight from the elected three-member Board of Selectmen (BOS). The roles of the Town Manager and BOS have been evolving over the past decade to become more efficient and more responsive to the needs of residents and businesses while meeting the Town's regulatory, statutory, and financial obligations. Below is a summary of Town's staffing levels and municipal functions that are performed in the Town Hall:





Department	Primary Responsibilities
<b>Accounting</b>	
Lisa Gabree, Town Accountant/Finance Manager Martha Reilly, Assistant Accountant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation of Payable Warrant</li> <li>• Review of Payroll</li> <li>• Month &amp; Year End Closings</li> <li>• Budget Reports: Monthly, Balance Sheet Documentation, Schedule A, and Annual Reports</li> <li>• Budget &amp; Forecast</li> <li>• Borrowing</li> </ul>
<b>Assessing</b>	
Tim Hogan, Assessing Dept. Administrator Jacquelyn Ann Guthrie, Assessing Dept. Assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motor Vehicle Excise Tax Administration</li> <li>• Statutory Exemption Administration</li> <li>• Deed/Ownership Processing</li> <li>• General Taxpayer Inquiries</li> <li>• Quinquennial Property Revaluation Program</li> <li>• New Growth &amp; Tax Rate Certification Processes</li> <li>• Inspections &amp; Abatements</li> <li>• Represent Town at Appellate Tax Board (ATB)</li> </ul>
<b>Benefits &amp; Payroll</b>	
Kevin Johnston, Benefits & Payroll Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversee payroll through Harpers Payroll Services</li> <li>• Manage Employee Benefits (varies by contract): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Health &amp; Life Insurance</li> <li>○ Retirement – Social Security, Pensions, Individual 457K plans, etc.</li> <li>○ Short &amp; Long Term Disability</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Building</b>	
Charles Shultz Jr., Building Commissioner & Zoning Enforcement Officer Heather Hampson, Administrative Coordinator Alan Parker, Wiring / Electrical Inspector Robert Friedrich, Plumbing & Gas Inspector Eric Aaltonen, Sealer of Weights and Measures Ronald Bernier, Alt. Building Inspector James Bakum, Asst. Plumbing / Gas Inspector Phil Horgan, Asst. Wiring / Electrical Inspector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Permit Applications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Additions &amp; Renovations</li> <li>○ Outbuildings (Sheds, barns, garages, pools)</li> <li>○ Electrical</li> <li>○ Gas Fitting &amp; Plumbing</li> <li>○ New Structures (Residential/Commercial/Other)</li> <li>○ Party Tents and Temporary Structures</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Subdivision Plan Applications</li> </ul>
<b>Clerk</b>	
Susan Copeland, Town Clerk Lauri Fritz, Assistant Town Clerk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Election Official</li> <li>• Licensing, Recording, and Public Records Official</li> <li>• Registrar of Vital Records</li> <li>• Election Oversight</li> <li>• Town Meeting Warrant &amp; Vote Recording</li> <li>• Oaths of Office, Appointments, and Resignations</li> <li>• Licenses (Marriage, Business, &amp; Dog)</li> <li>• Notary Public &amp; Justice of the Peace</li> </ul>



Department	Primary Responsibilities
<b>Department of Public Works</b>	
Mark Wetzel, PE, Superintendent Pamela Martin, Business Manager Dan Van Schalkwyk, Town Engineer Mona Bean, Department Assistant Water Department Staff Highway Department Staff Wastewater Department Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clean drinking water</li> <li>• Maintain and upgrade sewer and stormwater systems</li> <li>• Wastewater treatment</li> <li>• Maintain streets and sidewalks in good condition</li> <li>• Snow removal</li> <li>• Transfer station and solid waste removal</li> </ul>
<b>Economic and Community Development</b>	
Alan Manoian, AICP, Director Mark Archambault, AICP, Town Planner Jo-Anne Crystoff, Conservation Administrator Alicia Hersey, CDP Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoning, Subdivision, and Conservation Bylaw Administration &amp; Permitting</li> <li>• Ayer Industrial Finance Authority (IDFA)</li> <li>• Business/employee recruitment, attraction, retention</li> <li>• Community Development – Affordable and Senior Housing, Housing Rehabilitation Program</li> <li>• Special Projects (Master Plan, Zoning Rewrite, redevelopment of former fire station, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Information Technology</b>	
Cindy Knox, Information Technology Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain the Town's IT systems – hardware, software, security, backups, servers, radios, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hardware – Computers, printers, copiers, fire &amp; police radios, weather station, servers</li> <li>○ Facilities – DPW, Police, Fire, Council on Aging, and Town Hall</li> <li>○ Software – Maintain subscriptions for all of the Town's proprietary software</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Security and Email</li> <li>• Custodian of Town Website &amp; Social Media Accounts</li> </ul>
<b>Parks and Recreation</b>	
Jeff Thomas, Ayer Parks Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative – invoices, deposits, scheduling</li> <li>• Hiring, training, scheduling, and supervision of maintenance employees and volunteers</li> <li>• Program &amp; Facilities Management including servicing vehicles, tools, equipment, irrigation systems, as well as mowing, weed control, waste management, cleaning, etc.</li> <li>• Oversees youth recreation and sports programming</li> <li>• Manage Sandy Pond Beach and Pirone Park</li> </ul>
<b>Tax Collector/Treasurer</b>	
Susan Copeland, Tax Collector & Treasurer Christina Roberts, Assistant Tax Collector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect property and excise taxes, permit and license fees</li> <li>• Sewer and stormwater liens</li> <li>• Receiving and accounting for Town Funds</li> </ul>
<b>Town Manager</b>	
Robert Pontbriand, Town Manager Carly Antonelis, Asst. Town Manager	<p>Perform primary municipal functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personnel – hiring and firing, disciplinary action, contract negotiations, employment policies</li> <li>• Purchasing – enter into contracts for consulting services, equipment, technology, and other expenditures.</li> <li>• Budget – contract negotiations, staffing levels, etc.</li> </ul>





## Town Government Structure

Following the last Master Plan, the BOS appointed a Town Government Study Committee in 2010 to assess the organizational structure of the local government. The seven member committee was tasked with reviewing how well the government was performing services to residents and business and make recommendations for efficiencies that would maximize cost savings. The study made a number of recommendations including reducing the size and compensation of the BOS, adjusting job descriptions or consolidating positions, and reconfiguring some elected positions to appointed positions, in addition to an overall policy recommendation to establish a Town Charter. As a result of the study, some of the recommendations have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. For example, in 2012, Town Meeting voted to reduce the size of the Board of Selectmen from five members to three members. During the same Town Meeting, voters also changed the appointing authority for the Finance Committee from the BOS to the Town Moderator. There was also an attempt to reorganize the Town Treasurer and Tax Collector positions into one consolidated position and make it appointed rather than elected that same year, which failed on its first attempt at Town Meeting, but was approved at a Special Fall Town Meeting in 2017. Approved at the same Town Meeting in 2017, were an article establishing an appointed rather than elected Tree Warden, and an authorization for the BOS to file a petition with the General Court for special legislation establishing the position of Town Manager in lieu of the current Town Administrator position. This change will expand the Town Administrator's authority with respect to personnel, budget, and purchasing powers to allow the Town to conduct business more efficiently while meeting the Town's regulatory, statutory, and financial obligations. Moving forward, it is anticipated the Town will continue its efforts to professionalize services, increase public participation, and ensure that all boards, commissions, and committees are adequately staffed with Town employees and volunteers to better meet all municipal functions and responsibilities.

## Public Safety

### Ayer Police Department



The police station employs 1 chief, 1 lieutenant, 4 sergeants, 2 detectives, 12 patrol officers, 1 records clerk, 7 dispatchers, 4 prison watch personnel, 1 reserve officer, 1 animal control officer, and 1 administrative assistant. The police respond to more than 15,000 service calls on an annual basis, and the Police Department works closely with the Ayer-Shirley Regional School District and the Department's School Resource Officer to establish a positive relationship and address any school related issues. Although

serious crime in Ayer is rare, the most common issues the police attend to are accidents, assaults, burglaries and other types of larceny, drug/narcotic violations, and destruction of property. The Ayer Police perform a variety of community services and programs including: Bring Me Home, CORI requests, Citizen's Police Academy, process firearms forms and applications and solicitor's applications, traffic enforcement, and special events such as their annual 5k race.



## Ayer Fire Department



**Sparky the Firedog visits children at the Paige-Hilltop School**

The Fire Department (AFD) is served by a full-time chief, four captains, 5 lieutenants, and 4 full-time firefighters. Combination Company No. 1 has one captain, three lieutenants, 19 firefighters, and 4 Emergency Medical Technicians. AFD is responsible for fire protection, inspections, hazardous material removal permits, and ambulance services. AFD also participates in the S.A.F.E. (Student Awareness of Fire Safety), and works to provide students and senior citizens with knowledge about the dangers of fire and the necessity of fire prevention and working smoke detectors. In 2016, the AFD performed 406 inspections, issued 400 permits, and responded to 867 fire incidents and 1,392 ambulance calls for a total of 2,159 emergency responses. AFD maintains 2 engines, 1 ladder trucks, 1 heavy rescue truck, 1 rough terrain vehicle, 2 forestry vehicles, 1 service vehicle, 2 cars, and 2 ambulances, including a new Ambulance #1 that was purchased last year to replace the Town's 1997 ambulance. In upcoming years, the AFD anticipates they will need to replace Ambulance #2 which is slated to occur in 2019. As Engine #4 was built in 1993 and refurbished in 2014 and Ladder #1 was built in 1996, and refurbished in 2016, it is anticipated the Town will get some additional use out of those trucks before needing to replace them; Engine #2 was built in 2001 and is currently the oldest vehicle in the Fire Department's fleet that has not been refurbished or replaced.

## Board of Health

The Ayer Board of Health is a three-member board that employs a part-time assistant with offices located in the Town Hall. The Board of Health is associated with the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health (NABH), which functions as the Town's health agent. The Board of Health implements and oversees the policies and regulations as mandated by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Department of Environmental Protection. The Board of Health issues permits and performs inspections, oversees environmental cleanups, and offers information about public health issues like mosquito and tick born disease, ground water quality, flu clinics, medication and needles disposal, and other public health advisories.

## Department of Public Works

The Department of Public Works (DPW) is a key component to ensuring the safety, health, and welfare of Ayer residents. DPW is responsible for maintaining Ayer's roadways, water, sewer, and stormwater systems, as well as operating the transfer station and performing waste management services. DPW ensures that Ayer's drinking water supply and delivery systems meets state standards for cleanliness, Ayer's stormwater system and policies comply with the Town's MS4 stormwater permit, and that Ayer's roadways, bridges, and culverts are structurally sound, safe, and well maintained, including during snow and other emergency events. In addition to providing these public safety services, DPW also offers an online platform to submit service requests for things like potholes, sidewalk repairs, streetlight maintenance, illegal dumping, graffiti, and other issues. For more information regarding DPW's services and facilities and future needs, please review the Transportation and Infrastructure chapter within this Master Plan.



## Council on Aging

### COA MISSION STATEMENT

*THE COUNCIL ON AGING IS HERE TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY OF AYER AND ITS RESIDENTS THAT ARE 60+ YEARS OF AGE. THE COA IS A SERVE BASED DEPARTMENT TO HELP INCREASE THE QUALITY OF LIFE. WE ARE HERE TO ALSO HELP FAMILY MEMBERS CARING FOR THEIR LOVED ONES.*

Dubbed “The Center”, Ayer’s Council on Aging is staffed by 7 full and part-time employees, including an executive director, housekeeping, outreach, exercise, and nutrition coordinators, two MART van coordinators, as well as two volunteers. The Center is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and also provides services like meals, transportation, and special events outside of standard business hours. The Council on Aging is overseen by a five-member Executive Board, which currently has one vacancy, and meets monthly.

Membership to the Council on Aging is free to all residents 60 years of age and above in Ayer, which is approximately 1,200 people.<sup>2</sup> The

Center provides resources and services to promote the financial, physical, mental, and emotional well-being of Ayer’s seniors. There are free exercises classes offered at The Center three days a week, movies are shown twice a week, and crafting or adult coloring sessions are offered once a week. Lunch is served five days a week for a suggested \$3 donation, in addition to home-cooked meals which are served twice monthly, and free baked goods which are delivered three times a week. The Center also helps connect seniors with SHINE counselors, who provide free Medicare and Medicaid related insurance counseling. The Center operates an annual flu clinic, and offers assistance with the AARP tax program as well as the local senior tax exemptions and utility discounts, and fuel assistance. The COA organizes out-of-town and overnight trips, as well as functions with the Police, Fire, and School departments. The COA also holds a holiday party, and annual Italian Night with the Ayer Fire Department, and a May Day Celebration. **The COA serves approximately 1,200 seniors and their caregivers every year.**<sup>3</sup> In an average week, the COA serves approximately 375-400 people, but that number can increase by nearly 200 additional people when there are functions.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to health and wellness services, the COA provides transportation services to elderly and disabled residents in Ayer. The Montachusett Regional Transit Authority provides the COA with two MART vans which are operated by the MART van coordinators. MART van appointments are available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and weekly trips are offered after 3 p.m. to Tiny’s Diner, Walmart, Market Basket and loaves and fishes. Rides from the COA can be arranged by telephone 24 hours in advance and costs \$2 round-trip in Ayer, and \$4 round-trip outside of Ayer.



With the growth in the number of Ayer residents who are becoming seniors and utilizing the COA’s services, the existing space and parking at 18 Pond Street location is inadequate for existing services and is impeding the

<sup>2</sup> US Census 2010, DP1.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Karin Dynice-Swanfeldt, December 15, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Town of Ayer, *Annual Report*, 2016.



ability of The Center to meet the demand for services. The current facility has a maximum capacity of 70 persons, and consequently there are waiting lists for many events and activities. The Council on Aging will be seeking a \$30,000 appropriation at the Annual Spring Town Meeting in 2018 to study the feasibility of a new location for The Center.

## Parks & Recreation

Ayer's Parks and Recreation Department offers a wide variety of services to Ayer residents ranging from youth sports to summer camps, STEM educational programming, swimming lessons, lifeguarding at Sandy Pond, and special events. Parks and Recreation also performs the physical and administrative tasks required to deliver these services, such as park maintenance, scheduling, billing, and volunteer/part-time employee management. With one full-time employee in the Parks and Recreation Department, Ayer's recreational offerings are extremely dependent upon volunteers and the Parks Commissioners. Major programs offered in Ayer, like youth soccer, basketball, baseball, and softball are run independently, but in coordination with the Parks and Recreation Department. These programs are administered by a small committee that oversees each athletic program and handles scheduling, coaching, practices, equipment, and other necessities. The committees are typically made up of one of the five Parks Commissioners acting as chair, the Parks and Recreation Director acting as coordinator, and 3-5 additional volunteers serving as members. The following sports and recreation activities are offered:

Program	Description
Fall & Spring Soccer	Youth soccer is open to players ages 2-18 and has a program for all levels of play. U4, U6, and U8 teams are available for children under 8, and children ages 9 and above are eligible for travel teams.
Little Diggers Volleyball	Open to players in 3 <sup>rd</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade who are interested in learning to play volleyball. Sessions run from March to early May.
Basketball	Programs are available for PreK-8 <sup>th</sup> grade including the Miniballers PreK program, the K-2 Skills and Drills program, the 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> grade in-town instructional league, and 5 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grade travel teams. Basketball season extends March through Early June.
Swimming	Open to all levels 1-6, lessons are offered in the day and evening from July through August.
Baseball/Softball	Ayer Youth Baseball and Softball is offered to players ages 3-18 and runs from April through the summer, depending on the team and program.
Football/Cheer	Football and cheer are run independently through the ASYFC Board. Practices begin in August and run through November.
Yo!	Hiking, camping, and other outdoor recreation events for youth and families planned by YO! Organizers are offered to the public, often for little or no fee.
Tech Kids	A STEM program offering experiments and projects for girls in the 4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> grade is offered in the springtime to connect girls to female mentors in the STEM fields.
Summer Camps	The Parks Department offers a variety of Summer Camps in the Summer, and usually includes camps for soccer, baseball, softball, football, and basketball.

Demand for youth recreational and athletic programming exceeds the capacity of Ayer's Parks and Recreation Department offerings. In addition to Parks and Recreation, some needs are met through offerings of the Ayer-Shirley Regional School District and/or private recreation opportunities, however there are significant needs that



remain unmet. Presently there is no programming available for adults between the ages of 18 and 59. For residents 60 years of age and above, there is some recreational programming available through the Council on Aging, but the availability and frequency of these programs are constrained by the spatial limitations of The Center, and there is additional unmet demand in that age cohort as well. Further, there are times of the year (such as the winter) when there are either very few recreation options available or there could be more options offered but there are no facilities available for play or recreation due to demand from other sports and activities. **Figure MSF-1** shows the overlap in recreational programming offered by or coordinated through Ayer Parks and Recreation. Private recreation, travel teams, and Ayer-Shirley Regional School District teams generally follow the same seasons as Parks and Recreation and utilize the same facilities, thereby increasing the demand on public resources.

**Figure MSF-1: Ayer Parks and Recreation Programming**

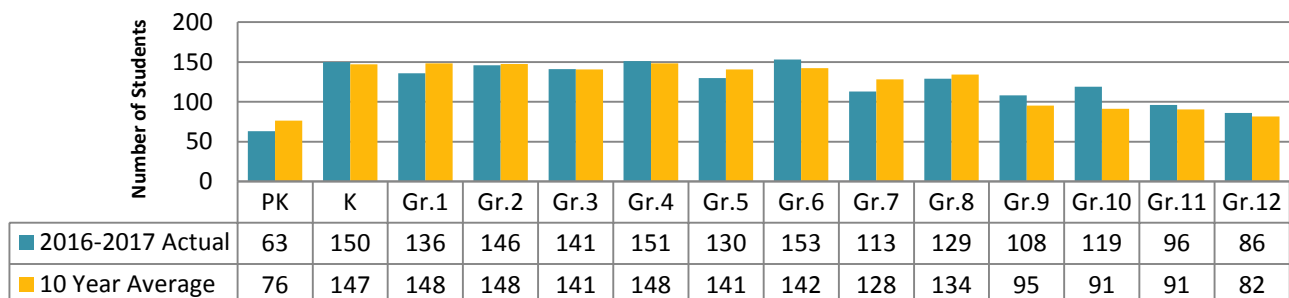
	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug
Soccer													
Volleyball													
Basketball													
Swimming													
BB/SB													
ASYFC													

Future challenges to the provision of services for Ayer's Park and Recreation will be to maintain adequate volunteer staffing levels and to address the constraints of limited facilities to sustain even the existing level of programming. Expanding services to offer programming to wider age ranges, expanding recreational offerings beyond athletics, and offering more community and arts-based programming will require new facilities and additional administrative oversight capabilities.

## Schools

Ayer's school system has experienced several major changes since the closure of Fort Devens in 1996, most notably the regionalization of the district and the major renovations of the High School and Middle School. Enrollment has been impacted by these changes. During the 1980's, Ayer's school enrollment was above 3,000 students. The 2016-2017 academic year saw peak enrollment since the 2011 district regionalization, but with a total student population of 1,721 students, enrollment remains well below levels seen while the military base was still in operation and is still slightly lower than enrollment levels prior to regionalization (**Chart MSF-3**).

**Chart MSF- 3: Ayer-Shirley Regional School District Enrollment By Grade (2016-2017)**





**Table MSF-6: Ayer-Shirley School-Age Children Population (1990-2030)**

Year	Population Count
1990	2,505
2000	2,576
2010	2,570
Proj. 2020	2,240
Proj. 2030	2,060

Source: MAPC Population Projections

Using population projections created by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the population of school-age children in Ayer is expected to decline in upcoming years. Factors like decisions regarding future housing development, as well as larger regional and national demographic trends, influence the size of the student population. However, even with the assumption of strong growth in the region, it is still projected that the overall size of Ayer's student population will decrease in upcoming years. A declining population of school-age children has long range planning implications for both facilities and services, as there will be fewer students to support and fund future district obligations.

**Table MSF-7: Profile of Ayer Schools (2016-2017 Academic Year)**

		Ayer-Shirley	Nashoba Tech	Francis Parker	Mass.
<b>Total Number of Students</b>		<b>1,721</b>	<b>731</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>953,701</b>
Population	Male	882	431	180	488,985
	Female	839	300	214	464,716
	Preschool and Kindergarten	213	-	-	95,605
	Elementary School (Grades 1-5)	704	-	-	352,732
	Middle School (Grades 6-8)	395	-	133	213,948
	High School (Grades 9-12)	409	715	262	291,463
Race (%)	African American	4.4	0.7	0.5	8.9
	Asian	2.8	0.8	1.5	6.7
	Hispanic	10.7	6.3	2.8	19.4
	Native American	0.3	0.8	0	0.2
	White	76.4	88.7	91.6	61.3
	Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.4	0	0	0.1
	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	4.9	2.7	3.5	3.4
Social Factors (%)	First Language not English	7.7	1.1	1	20.1
	English Language Learner	3.4	0	0	9.5
	Students With Disabilities	20.1	34.2	15.9	17.4
	High Needs	38.8	47.8	19.7	45.2
	Economically Disadvantaged	23.8	19.5	5.3	30.2
Performance	Graduation Rate (2016)	93.5%	96.8%	85.2%	87.5%
	Student/Teacher Ratio (2016)	12 : 1	11.6 : 1	8.6 : 1	13.2 : 1
	Total Expenditure per Student (Avg. 2012-2016)	\$14,090	\$18,374	n/a	\$15,545
	Number of Teachers (Avg. 2012-2016)	122	58	46	69,734
	Average Teacher Salary (Avg. 2012-2016)	\$68,154	\$71,504	n/a	\$76,522

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2017)





**Table MSF-7** provides a comparison profile of Ayer schools and schools in Massachusetts as a whole. Following regionalization, approximately 60 percent of the students enrolled in the Ayer-Shirley School District reside in Ayer. There are currently 528 students enrolled at the Page-Hilltop School, serving Ayer students, and an additional 389 enrolled at the Lura White Elementary School in Shirley. In addition to the Ayer-Shirley Regional School District, students in Ayer have the option to attend the Nashoba Valley Technical High School, offering grades 9 through 12 and located in Westford, or the Francis Parker Charter School, which offers grades 6-12 and is located on Devens.



*Ayer-Shirley Regional School Committee*

Although the Ayer-Shirley Regional School District and the six-member School Committee are semi-autonomous from the Towns of Ayer and Shirley, their programming and services are most directly influenced by local voters. The middle school and high school provide athletic programming that is generally not provided through Parks and Recreation. This includes school sports such as football, soccer, baseball, softball, track, volleyball, hockey, swimming, and golf. The ASRHS swim team practices with the Bromfield School in Harvard, and swims at the Harvard Ridge pool in Boxborough. The ASRHS hockey team plays with Lunenburg and practices at the Wallace Arena in Fitchburg. The ASRHS indoor track team practices in the ASRHS gym and outdoor

facilities when weather and availability permits, but holds their home meets at Fitchburg High School. In addition to athletics, the high school also offers the following clubs: Literary Magazine, Destination Imagination, Drama, Leadership Club, Mock Trial, Model United Nations, Music/Band/Choir, National Honor Society, Robotics, Student Council, and Yearbook.

In addition to athletics and enrichment, the Ayer-Shirley Regional School District offers an early childhood program for PreK and full-day tuition-free Kindergarten education at both elementary schools, which gives Ayer's youngest residents an educational advantage in obtaining language, mathematics, and socialization skills. The school district also offers the Ayer Childcare Program, which operates at the Page Hilltop School and provides preschool through middle school children with a safe, supervised and fun place to spend before/after school hours from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on school days. In addition to school days the program operates on professional development days, early release days, December, February and April school vacations, and offers a full day summer camp to provide working parents with an affordable and enriching childcare option within Ayer.



## Municipal Facilities

### Public Buildings

#### Town Hall



Constructed in 1876 with funds provided by Dr. James Cook Ayer of Lowell, Ayer's Town Hall was the recipient of a Preservation Award from the Massachusetts Historical Commission after its 2003 restoration. The restoration included modernization projects such as the installation of an elevator and egress stair and other accessibility accommodations, refurbishment of historic interiors including the Great Hall, and the restoration of the polychromed brick, tile, and stone exterior façade. Although the Town Hall previously housed the Fire Department until 1934, and the Police Department and local jail until 1997, those departments were separated and are

now located in separate purpose-built municipal buildings. The Town Hall currently houses the offices of the Town Administration, Assessor, Tax Collector and Treasurer, Town Clerk, Economic and Community Development, Parks and Recreation, Veterans' Services, and Information Technology departments.

Today, Ayer's Town Hall is a hub of activity with some departments experiencing severe constraints with respect to meeting space, storage space, and office space; while other areas of the building, such as the Great Hall, remain largely underutilized. Ensuring that the Town has adequate public meeting spaces to meet the scheduling needs of all boards, commissions, and department activities, and that Town employees have the physical space and resources to perform their duties will become increasingly challenging in upcoming years and may require some creative solutions.

#### Police Station



Ayer's police station, located at 54 Brook Street, was completed and occupied in 1997 on the site of a former Department of Public Works facility. The building is approximately 13,300 square feet, fully accessible, hosts a community meeting room with space for 30 people, and sits on a 1.2 acre lot with parking on site.

When the building was originally constructed, it was built with room to accommodate future growth. However, after 20 years of occupancy, the Police Department has grown in size and is experiencing some challenges with having inadequate space and facilities to perform all of their community functions.



### *Fire Station*



The Fire Department occupies a 20,100 square foot building located on a 1.3 acre lot at 15 West Main Street. The building was constructed and completed in 2005 after the Fire Department had outgrown their previous facility. The old fire station, located on Washington Street, is a historic building and had been in

use from 1934 until 2005. The building is now a surplus building in the process of disposition and is slated for redevelopment into luxury housing. The current home of the Fire Station on West Main Street is located on a former brownfield site that contained asbestos, and arsenic as well as undocumented underground storage tanks, the discovery of which led to project delays and costly budget overruns. The current fire department facility meets the spatial needs of fire operations, but has inadequate parking and is subject to sporadic flooding. Increasing parking capacity and managing storm water and flooding concerns are the biggest spatial challenges facing Ayer's Fire Department in upcoming years.

### *Ayer Public Library*



The historic Ayer Library was originally constructed in 1894, and significantly expanded and renovated in 1997 after a significant community planning effort. The building grew from 2,700 square feet to 11,000 square feet, with a parking lot to accommodate 60 vehicles; both the building and the parking lot

are completely accessible to persons with disabilities. The library is overseen by an elected nine-member Board of Trustees, who are responsible for general policy guidance and long-term planning. The library employs eight people, including a director, assistant director, a children's and young adult services provider, two circulation librarians, a library technician, and two circulation assistants. Ayer's public library serves as a regional resource. The library's collections include over 50,000 print materials including books, newspapers, magazines, and journals, in addition to DVDs, audio-books, compact discs, and numerous digital resources and subscriptions. The library also includes a heavily utilized children's room, a community meeting room which seats 50 people and has a kitchenette, publicly available computers, and an Ayer resource room that holds historic collections of local and regional interest. A study will need to be undertaken in upcoming years to reconfigure interior space to meet programming needs.

### *The Center*







The Council on Aging (COA) offices, programming, and services for residents 60 years of age and older are operated out of The Center at 18 Pond Street. The Center is a 4,000 square foot space located in the basement of the Ayer Housing Authority senior and congregate housing complex, and is adjacent to Pirone Park. As the building is built into a hill, The Center is located at-grade with parking in the rear of the building, but is not easily accessible from the front of the building where additional parking is located. The 17 space parking lot serving the Center is shared by employees, patrons, and the COA's MART vans, and is frequently in short supply during high demand times at The Center.



### Town-Owned Recreational Facilities

*For a comprehensive review of all recreational facilities, please see the Resources chapter of this Master Plan.*

#### Sandy Pond Beach



Ayer's chain of ponds provides a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities for hiking, swimming, boating, bird watching, and other activities. Sandy Pond Beach, which is maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department, offers volleyball and basketball courts, a playground, and a clubhouse, in addition to a sand beach and swim raft that is overseen by a team of lifeguards. Sandy Pond Beach is well-loved by Ayer residents and in recent years, crowding and parking management have

become increasingly more significant issues. In 2016, the Parks Commission changed park policies to charge non-residents a daily fee for park usage (\$5 for adults, and \$3 for children) and to reserve the lower parking lot for Ayer residents only. There was some consideration to close the park and beach entirely to non-residents, but as the Town receives funding from the state's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), the beach must remain



open to the general public or forfeit funds. However, the entrance fees will help offset the estimated \$35,000-\$40,000 annual operating cost of the beach, and Ayer residents should experience less parking pressure due to these changes. Finding a long-term parking solution for and maintaining a safe level of usership will be long-term needs for Sandy Pond Beach.

### *Pirone Park*



Pirone Park is the crown jewel of Ayer's public parks. Situated on Grove Pond, the 18 acre park's waterfront views and open fields offer exceptional passive recreation opportunities. Pirone Park hosts the Town's largest annual event, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration, which includes vendors, food, a bike decorating contest (originating at the Nashoba Valley Rail Trail), activities, music, and fireworks.

There is one boat launch to provide boating access to Grove Pond at Pirone Park, however, swimming is not

available as there is some heavy metal sedimentation in the pond soil from prior industrial use. The park's athletic fields, which include 5 baseball/softball diamonds, 5 soccer fields, and 2 basketball courts are in heavy use (largely by Ayer youth sports) and require regular maintenance to ensure their continued and future utility. The park also features a playground with a sizable and beloved wooden playscape. Unfortunately, the playscape, constructed with pressure treated lumber, contains arsenic and its remediation and replacement with comparable equipment is a long-term necessity and future funding challenge.

Parking and stormwater management are also long-term challenges. To address storm water runoff, a rain garden was installed in 2016 in the upper parking lot at Pirone Park. The parking lot was originally designed so that the water in the parking lot would funnel into the lower field and the west side of the playground during heavy rain. Channels cut into the field and hillside from heavy rain flows created unsafe conditions and contributed to erosion. With the installation of the raingarden, a system was created to trap the water as it flowed out of the lot and funnel it into a chamber that would slowly release the water as it drained into the lower field. The rain garden, pictured above, is both decorative and functional as it prevents the harmful erosion previously being caused by storm water runoff.

### *Dog Park*



Ayer is currently in the process of constructing a 1-acre dog park near the intersection of Sandy Pond Road and Snake Hill Road. The dog park will provide a safe, partially shaded, and fully enclosed area for Ayer residents to bring their dogs to socialize and play off-leash. The dog park will feature benches and parking for the dogs' human companions and will serve as a future gathering place for Ayer residents and their [well socialized] dogs.

### Future Recreation Facilities Needs

Table MSF-8: Current & Future Recreation Resource Needs in Ayer				
Activity	# Facilities	Recommended per Population Size*	2015 Needs	2030 Needs
Basketball	4	1 per 5,000	-2.5	-2.5
Ice Hockey	1**	1 per 100,000	-0.9	-0.9
Field Hockey	0	1 per 20,000	0.4	0.4
Volleyball	2	1 per 3,000	0.5	0.6
Baseball	3	1 per 3,000	-0.5	-0.4
Softball	2	1 per 3,000	0.5	0.6
Football	1	1 per 20,000	-0.6	-0.6
1/4 Mile Track	1	1 per 20,000	-0.6	-0.6
Soccer	3	1 per 10,000	-2.3	-2.2
Pool	1**	1 per 20,000	-0.6	-0.6
Golf Course	18**	18 holes per 25,000	-0.7	-0.7
Tennis	3	1 per 2,000	0.7	0.8
<b>Additional Public Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 General Use School Gymnasiums</li> <li>Nashua River Rail Trail</li> <li>Hiking Trails</li> <li>Kayak Launches</li> <li>Sandy Pond Public Beach</li> <li>Dog Park (currently under construction)</li> </ul>				
<p>* Standards for the provision of facilities were developed by the National Recreational and Park Association (NRPA)</p> <p>** ASRHS Ice Hockey is offered at Wallace Rink in Fitchburg</p> <p>ASRHS swimming is offered at the Harvard Ridge Pool in Boxborough</p> <p>ASRHS golf is offered at Shaker Hills and/or Groton Country Club</p>				

The National Recreational and Park Association (NRPA) has established general guidelines for municipal needs on a per capita basis. While their guidelines do not address all types of recreational facilities (omitting such popular features as hiking or bicycling trails, beaches, or general use parks), they do help provide a framework for evaluating future needs. In **Table MSF-8**, current needs (as of 2015) and future needs (based on strong population growth projections by MAPC) are shown. Values highlighted in red show the number of facilities that will need to be built in the future. Per NRPA standards, softball, field hockey, and tennis facilities are currently deficient, and will become more deficient in the future.

However, current demand for recreation facilities already outstrips the ability of the Town meet all

requests for use. Indoor space, a general use gymnasium, in particular, are cited by the Parks Director, is the Town's most critical recreation facilities needs. To address this concern, there have been discussions about constructing an additional stand-alone gym at ASRHS, as well as a \$7m proposal to refurbish the school's athletic fields. However, given the recreation and facilities needs of the senior, adult, and youth populations, a community center that can meet multiple programming and facilities needs is likely the most efficient way for the Town to comprehensively address these otherwise competing issues.

### Schools

Extensive studies of Ayer's school buildings were conducted prior to regionalization to determine the best course of action for consolidating Ayer and Shirley's existing facilities and constructing new facilities to meet future needs. Options included construction of a new high school, combining the high schools and middle schools and expanding at the middle school, or renovating and expanding the existing high school. Ultimately, the Towns decided to renovate and expand the existing combined middle and high school building in Ayer and turn it into a regional high school. The 145,000 square foot building, originally constructed in 1963 with upgrades in 1983 and 1996, was approved by voters for a \$55.6m renovation in 2012. The building, which once





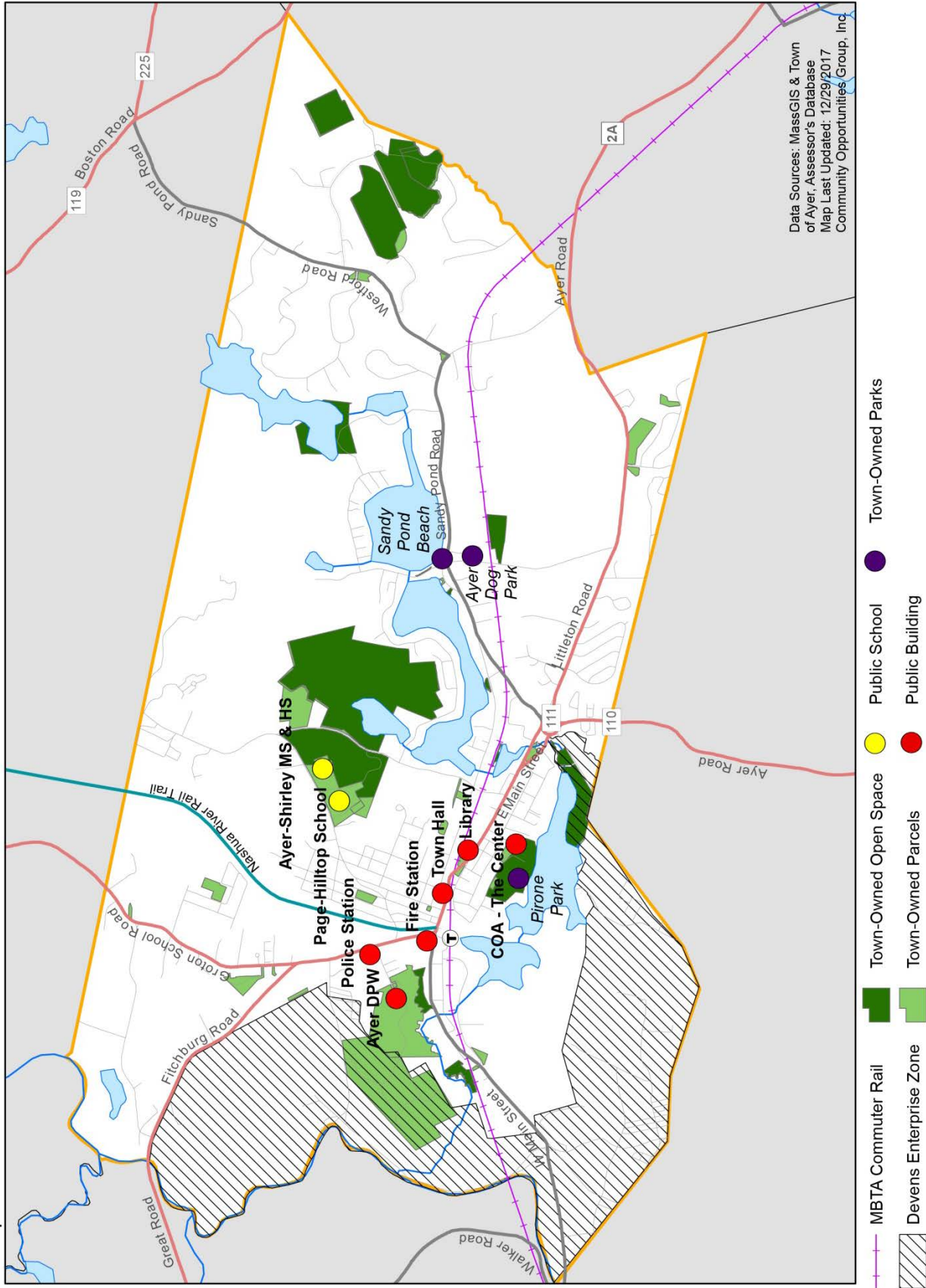
housed over 1,000 students, is now built to have capacity for 460 students. The Massachusetts School Building Association provided 70 percent of the funds for the school building, with the towns providing the remaining \$19m needed to complete the project. The High School, Middle School, and Page-Hilltop Elementary School sites were reimagined as a campus with shared administrative space, and with the new main entrance of the high school replacing a former loading dock that faced the elementary school, and the installation of courtyards, the connectivity of the buildings was improved substantially. The middle school, which was constructed in 2003, was retained for use by the ASRSD, as it was determined to meet the district-wide needs for middle school education during that analysis. The Page-Hilltop School has the most uncertain future. Originally constructed in 1965 and expanded in 1975, the Page-Hilltop School has the most serious issues with facilities. In addition to typical maintenance and repair issues, trace amounts of lead were found in the school's water bubblers due to the presence of lead elbow joints during the Summer of 2017. The future of the Lura A. White Elementary School, which was originally built in 1936, expanded in 1959 and 1978, and renovated as part of the regionalization master plan, also remains uncertain. It is likely both communities will have a strong desire to retain their elementary schools in upcoming years, but with both buildings in need of repairs, and a declining population of school-age children, decisions regarding the future of these buildings, as well as opportunities related to their potential reuse (such as a community center), will be necessary in upcoming years.

## Future Needs

Programs & Services	Facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanded senior recreation offerings</li> <li>Expanded special education and advanced placement course offerings as required</li> <li>Adult recreation and enrichment programming</li> <li>American's with Disabilities Act Transition Plan</li> <li>Community Center feasibility study</li> <li>Parking study for rec resources</li> <li>Downtown wayfinding signage and Parking Management Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DPW Operations Center</li> <li>DPW Equipment Garage</li> <li>Elementary School</li> <li>Community/Senior Center</li> <li>Indoor Recreation</li> <li>Storage, meeting, and office space</li> <li>Farmers Market Location</li> <li>Neighborhood Parks in underserved areas (e.g. Devenscrest, Grove Pond)</li> </ul>



# **Town of Ayer, Massachusetts** Municipal Facilities



## Formative Issues

Assets and Opportunities	Challenges and Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Governance.</b> Ayer is making great strides to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the local government to cost-effective services and programs. Moving to a Town Manager form of government allows the town to operate more efficiently by concentrating and sufficiently endowing decision-making authority in one office. This allows for the timely processing of contracts and other important paperwork, as well as for the procurement of goods and services, and staffing maintenance.         </li> <li> <b>Professionalization of Services.</b> Moving to appointed rather than elected board, commission, and staff positions, the Town is more able to recruit and retain qualified candidates that are entrusted to make decisions impacting Ayer's current and future quality of life.         </li> <li> <b>Volunteerism.</b> Much of Ayer's ability to keep residential property taxes low depends on town residents volunteering to perform critical functions such as serving on boards, commissions, and committees, attending public meetings, participating in clean-ups and water testing and other routine maintenance, administering recreation programming, and other such activities. Ayer's volunteers are essential in maintaining a high quality of life. Further, the Town is committed to increasing citizen participation and has created a portal on the Town's website to view and apply for all available town-related volunteer opportunities.         </li> <li> <b>Proactive Financial Planning.</b> Although the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process is required of all municipalities, Ayer's Town leadership and staff are particularly proactive in ensuring ongoing and adequate investment in Ayer's facilities, infrastructure, and resources to ensure their continued health. Although serious funding challenges remain, the Town is proactive in identifying future needs, regulatory changes, and funding opportunities to ensure the Town's ongoing success.         </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Participation and Civic Engagement.</b> A number of Ayer's local boards and commissions suffer from chronic vacancies, and the Town has a difficult time garnering enough interest to sustainably fill these positions. In addition, attendance rates at Town Meetings are extremely low, with quorums periodically jeopardized. If quorums are not reached at Town Meeting, the Town cannot approve its budget and other critical warrants that are required to ensure the Town remains in compliance with local and state regulations. The Town would like to see a participation rate of 80 percent of registered voting to ensure that local votes are more broadly representative of Ayer's entire residential population.         </li> <li> <b>Succession Planning.</b> The majority of Ayer's municipal department heads will be reaching retirement age within the next 5-10 years. With extremely limited budgets, the Town has limited opportunity to create junior staffing positions to ensure that institutional knowledge and occupational training are extended to the next generation of public employees. In addition, many of Ayer's board and committee members are also reaching the end of their tenures in Town leadership and vacancies will increase without new volunteers to serve in these positions.         </li> <li> <b>Expanding Facilities and Services.</b> Many of the Town's departments are constricted by insufficient meeting and program space, storage space, and office space. Addressing facilities needs while also expanding programming and services to meet residential demand will be enormously challenging in upcoming years as the solution to these issues likely requires the construction of a new facility, such as a community center, to provide meeting space, storage space, recreation, and senior programming and facilities.         </li> <li> <b>Finance limitations.</b> Meeting funding needs to perform required functions, provide sufficient services, and maintain and upgrade existing facilities and infrastructure will remain Ayer's greatest challenge in upcoming years.         </li> </ul>



## Recommendations:

- Work with industrial and residential users to participate in water conservation and water quality protection, including monitoring best management practices, the installation of new meters, and banning underground sprinklers in lieu of using native plants.
- Use zoning to limit development and adequately protect areas around sensitive water resources.
- Find new wellhead locations to continue to serve Ayer's water users with safe and clean drinking water.
- Expand Ayer's recreation offerings and improve facilities. There is currently no adult programming, limited senior programming, and youth sports offered through the ASRSD or Recreation. Youth sports are greatly impacted by the availability of indoor recreation space and outdoor fields.
- Establish a community garden program at the Paige-Hilltop School to produce healthy food for the school and teach students about sustainable food systems. Gardens in other areas of town should be considered as well as some lots do not have adequate sun exposure, soil conditions, or a water source.
- Evaluate the Town's taxation policy and consider the adoption of a Small Business Tax Exemption.
- Continue to fund and professionalize town services to meet regulatory compliance needs and the needs of residents and businesses in Ayer.
- Create an accurate inventory of Town assets and review town buildings and land that may be appropriate for disposition or redevelopment.

