

Resources

Natural, Cultural, Recreation, and Historic Resources

Natural Resources

13.5% of Ayer's total area is wetland and open water.

33% of Ayer is forested.

Significant resources include

- Nashua River Corridor
- Chain of ponds
- Snake Hill
- 2 ACECs and Primary Habitat Areas cover nearly ½ of Ayer

1,200 acres protected or semi-protected open space

Recreation

Pirone Park

Sandy Pond Beach

School facilities

Nashua River Rail Trail

Trail networks

Boating and fishing

Private facilities & vendors

Historic Resources

State/National Register Historic Districts in Downtown Ayer & Devens

Buildings & other structures from late 18th through early 20th Centuries

Cultural Resources

Library

Schools/Community Ed.

Senior Center

Cultural Council

Freedom's Way National Heritage Corridor

United Native American Cultural Center

Fort Devens Museum

Introduction

Ayer's natural and historic resources, open space, recreation, and cultural facilities are essential to the community's identity and vitality. These resources define both the physical character and the social connectivity that foster Ayer's small town feel and its unique sense of place – from glacial topography and surface waters, to the historic influences that shaped the town's development patterns, to the organizations and programs that bring residents together to share information, ideas, teamwork, health, and fun.

Moreover, these natural resources contribute to the town economically. High yield aquifers provide millions of gallons per day of drinking water for residents and large-scale industrial users; wetlands and open space help to protect developed areas of the town from flooding and from contamination of groundwater and surface waters; regionally significant recreational and cultural facilities attract visitors; and the resources that contribute to the quality of life and aesthetic beauty of the town help to attract investment in residential and commercial development that maintain the Town's fiscal sustainability.

Town staff, citizen volunteers, and regional organizations have effectively partnered to manage the stewardship of Ayer's natural and historic resources and to develop facilities and programming to serve the recreational and cultural needs of the public. A number of planning efforts, including the Town's and Devens' Open Space and Recreation Plans, Master Plans for the Nashua River Watershed Association and Oxbow National Wildlife Area, the Freedom's Way National Heritage Corridor, and specific resource management studies have highlighted strategies for resource protection, partnership, and the development of regional connections. Continued collaboration in the implementation of these plans will help to accomplish mutual goals to protect irreplaceable resources and to build awareness and strengthen bonds between residents and between partners in the community and the region.

Resource Goals:

1. Protect Ayer's natural resources, including surface and groundwater, habitats, and unique landscapes.
2. Expand access to recreational opportunities for all residents.
3. Highlight and promote Ayer's historical and natural assets that define the Town's character.
4. Expand organizational capacity and awareness of Ayer's recreational and cultural programming.
5. Make Ayer more sustainable by promoting the concept of a local food system and increase access to local food.

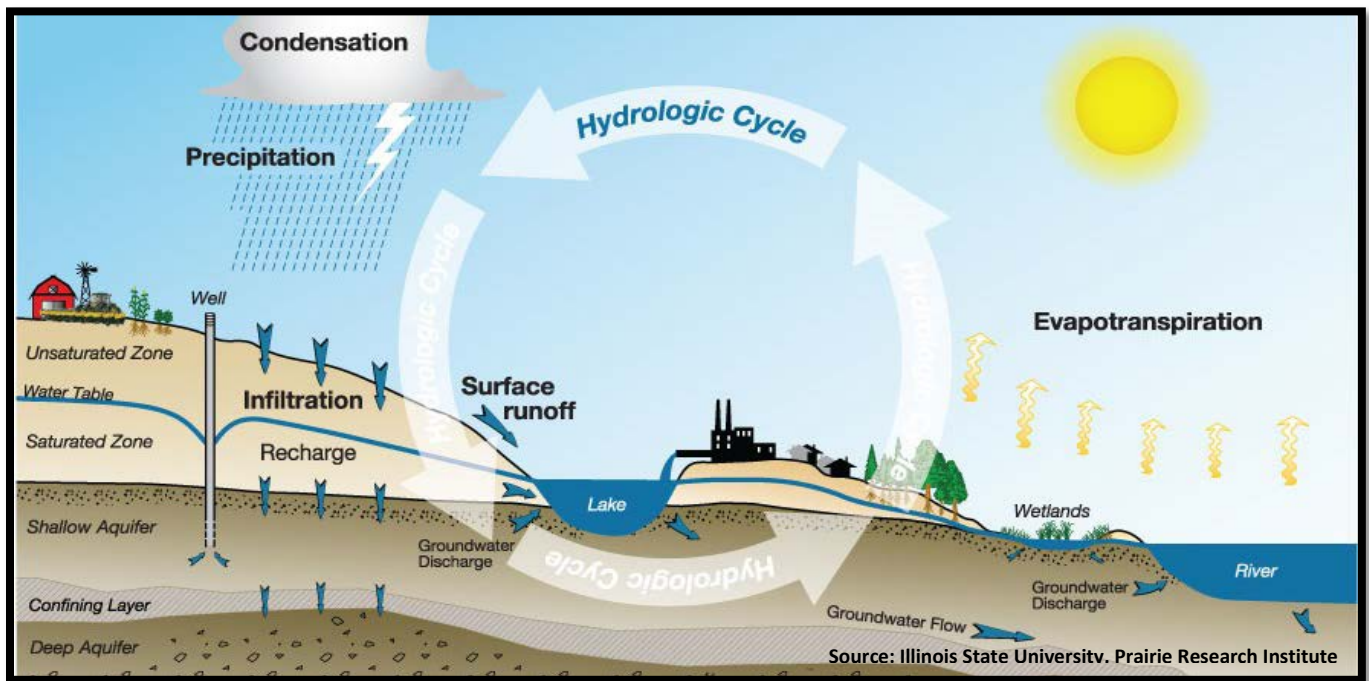


Inventory of Natural Resources

Ayer's topography has been distinctively shaped by glaciers which left behind a unique system of landforms, ponds, and soil deposits. Ayer's landscape is dominated by a network of large and small rivers, brooks and ponds. Water resources, forests, geological features, and other natural resources within a variety of undeveloped areas define the town's physical character and provide wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. Surface-water and groundwater resources provide drinking water throughout the region and supply major industrial users. Open space areas are also important for reducing flood hazards, filtering ground water to remove pollutants, and stabilizing soils to prevent erosion and sedimentation.

Water Resources

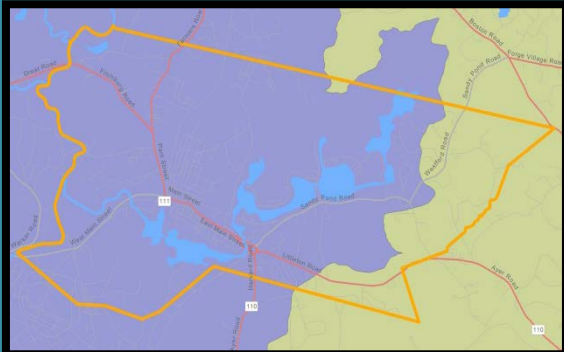
Figure 1 - The Atmospheric, Surface, and Groundwater Cycle



Ayer's water resources are comprised of three different, but related and interconnected types of water: surface, ground, and atmospheric. **Atmospheric water** is generally felt or seen in the form of clouds, precipitation, and humidity. Precipitation is caused by the evaporation of water from water bodies (lakes, rivers, oceans) and transpiration of water from plants, which turns liquid water into vapor and rises into the atmosphere. The vapor is then cooled by the atmosphere and condenses into clouds, the clouds are then moved by winds which cause them to condense and produce precipitation. Precipitation then collects on the earth's surface and becomes surface water. **Surface waters** collect within watershed systems and drain into wetlands or other types of water bodies, which act as a filtration system to remove contaminants and pollutants before the water is absorbed into the ground and becomes ground water. **Groundwater** is the water found underground in the cracks and spaces in soil, sand and rock and is stored in and moves slowly through geologic formations of soil, sand and rocks called aquifers. **Aquifers** provide drinking water to homes and businesses and are absolutely vital to the survival of the community. Ensuring that ground water resources are protected from contamination, overuse, or other types of impairment requires the protection of surface waters and surrounding open space areas. Effective storm water management to control pollution and mitigate flooding, reducing impervious surfaces, air quality control measures, and continuous water quality monitoring all can contribute positively.

Ayer's Water Resources

Watersheds

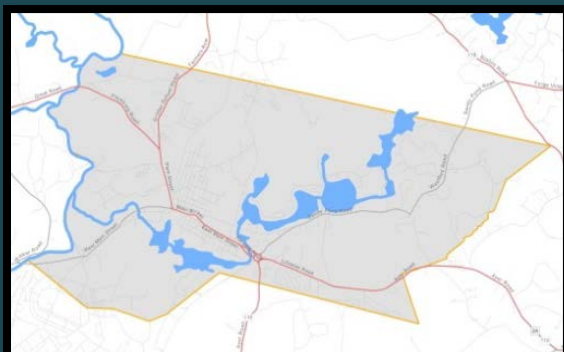


A **watershed** is a drainage basin where all precipitation collects and flows into a stream or set of streams. Ayer is located within the Nashua River (Purple) and the Merrimack River Watersheds (Green).

Ayer lies mostly within the Nashua River Watershed, which encompasses 538 square miles in 31 communities in north central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. The eastern end of the town lies with the larger Merrimack River Watershed which extends to the north and east, with the boundary between the two located approximately along Westford Road.

Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA) is a non-profit organization founded in 1969 to promote clean-up of what had been one of the nation's most polluted rivers. The organization continues to work to support clean water and open spaces and a healthy ecosystem for both human and wildlife communities within the watershed region. NRWA completed a 2020 Vision Plan in 1995, outlining goals and priorities for natural resource restoration, conservation and education, guiding the organization's ongoing projects and initiatives.

Surface Waters



Surface water is the water on the surface of the planet, i.e. lakes, streams, rivers, and oceans. Surface water is replenished by precipitation and ground water sources.

Ayer's rivers and ponds are shown in blue above.

The main stem of the Nashua river forms the western boundary of the town, spanning 100 feet wide in Ayer. The Nashua River provides drinking water, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and scenic views; there is an ongoing effort to have the Nashua River designated as a Wild and Scenic River through the National Park Service. A chain of ponds begins in easternmost Ayer at Spectacle Pond on the Littleton border and Long Pond on the Groton border and extends southwest to Plow Shop Pond before entering the Nonaicoicus Brook and eventually the Nashua River. Three of Ayer's ponds – Long, Sandy and Spectacle – are classified by the state as Great Ponds, and must be kept open to general public. Grove, Flannagan and Pine Meadow ponds are manmade and were created by damming.

Five smaller brooks in Ayer feed the Nashua River and local ponds, including Bennett's Brook, Cold Spring Brook, the Nonaicoicus Brook, and James Brook. Beginning in the late 1800's, tremendous amounts of industrial pollution were dumped daily into the Nashua River and some of Ayer's ponds. Subsequently, the Nashua River had nationally recognized pollution issues, and despite significant cleanup efforts it is still listed as an impaired waterway, as are Grove, Plow Shop, and Spectacle Ponds.¹ Grove and Plow Shop Ponds not only contain invasive aquatic plants but also suffer from heavy metal contamination, in particular arsenic and mercury. The public use of Plow Shop Pond is prohibited due to heavy metal toxicity in its sediment, and only boating is allowed on Grove Pond for the same reason. In 2013, the U.S. Army engaged in a clean-up effort on a portion of Plow Shop Pond, removing several thousand cubic feet of heavy-metal impacted sediment from Red Cove and the Railroad Roundhouse shoreline.² The Ayer Conservation Commission and DPW commissioned a biological survey and management plan in 2014, and is working with the Pond & Dam Management Committee to plan for long term management of key ponds.³

¹ These waterways are designated as Class B or Category 5 on the 2014 Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters, meaning they require Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or environmental remediation plans. Flannagan Pond is also listed as impaired, but under Category 4, due to invasive species growth rather than pollutants.

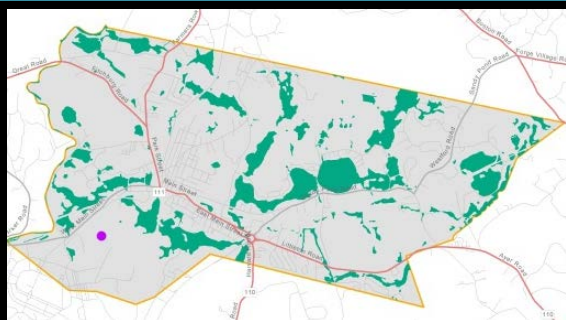
² QSRP 2015 page 49

³ Geosyntec, "Biological Survey, Assessment and Management Recommendations for Ayer's Ponds." 2016.



Ayer's Water Resources

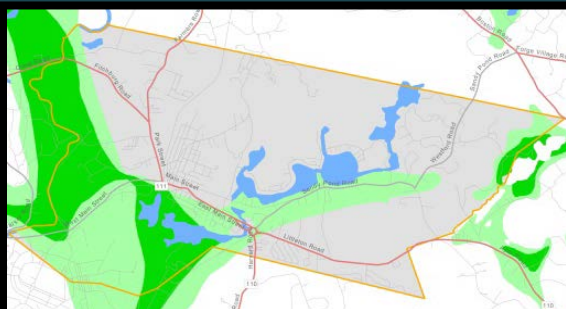
Wetlands and Vernal Pools



Ayer's wetlands (shown in green) and vernal pools (magenta dots) are found in low lying areas and are typically adjacent to surface waters.

Wetlands play a critical role in water storage and flood control, and many species of wildlife depend on wetland habitat. Wetlands also protect water quality and function as groundwater recharge and discharge areas. A diverse array of wetlands in Ayer include bog habitats in the central-east, shallow marsh meadow/fens in the west and east, deep marsh areas scattered throughout, and mixed wooded swamps in the east and west of town. There are two certified vernal pools and over twenty potential vernal pools that have not been officially recognized in Ayer. Vernal pools, also known as ephemeral pools, autumnal pools, and temporary woodland ponds, typically fill with water in the autumn or winter due to rainfall and rising groundwater and remain ponded through the spring and into summer. They provide critical habitat area for certain types of wildlife that typically use the vernal pools for spawning, as well as for certain types of plants which thrive in the shallow waters.

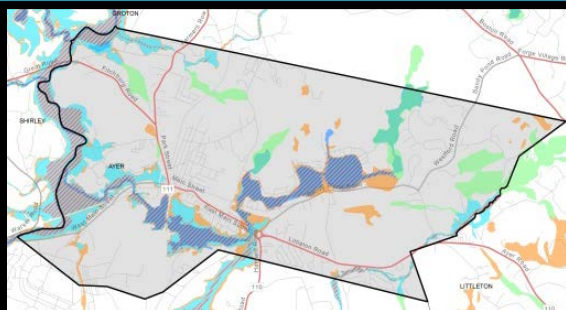
Aquifers



Underground aquifers extend outside Ayer's boundaries, and require regional coordination to manage. Aquifers vary in yield (how much water can be sustainably pumped and recharged back into the aquifer) and are a competitive resource.

Ayer's drinking water is supplied by four wellheads located within two high-yield aquifers – one along the Nashua River, and a smaller aquifer that follows Ayer's eastern border within the Merrimack River Watershed. The aquifers are shown in dark green and light green on the map (darker green aquifers are higher yield than the aquifer areas colored in light green). The Town's wellheads are located at Spectacle Pond and Grove Pond; there is a filtration plant at Spectacle Pond and a treatment plant at Grove Pond to ensure Ayer's public water supply meets water quality standards. An additional aquifer, located beneath the Moore Airfield at Devens, may present an opportunity in the future to expand Ayer's drinking water resources. However, the return of the Airfield to Ayer is deeply uncertain, and if it were returned, there may be additional challenges as DEP regulations may preclude tapping into the aquifer instead of utilizing clean sources from existing wells due to contamination stemming from past and present uses of the airfield.

Flood Hazard Areas



Floodplains, areas of low-lying ground adjacent to a river, formed mainly of river sediments and subject to flooding are the primary types of flood hazard in Ayer.

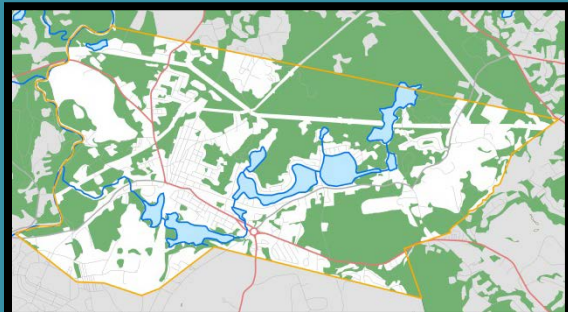
Flood Hazard areas in Ayer that have strong potential for flooding follow the Nashua River corridor and along the network of ponds and brooks. Due to the presence of Devens and the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge along the Nashua River, which has approximately 263 acres located in Ayer, little to no infrastructure has been built in the 100- and 500-year flood zones along the river in the western part of town. The town has adopted an Overlay Floodplain Zoning District, the boundaries of which are defined by the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) dated 1982. However, several areas remain vulnerable to flooding during heavy rain events, such as the area near Park Street and West Main Street. Recent years have brought property damage due to flooding. Upgrades to Ayer's stormwater system and continued protection of flood prone areas will remain critical in upcoming years to mitigate the impacts of stronger storms on inland waterways.

Species & Habitats

Ayer's rivers, ponds, brooks, streams, vernal pools, swamps, marshes provide aquatic and semi-aquatic habitat for water-specific species. Corridors are important to the health of certain wildlife species, in particular larger mammals that require larger habitat areas. Ayer has three important wildlife corridors, including the riparian corridor along the Nashua River, undeveloped forests in eastern Ayer, and the high-tension power line corridor.

Plant and Animal Species in Ayer

Vegetation

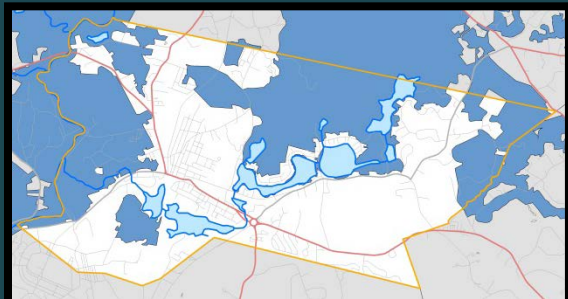


Nearly half of Ayer is identified as Prime Forest Land (Identified in green); of that area, 235 acres located near Bennett's Brook contain the most productive forest land soils.

According to National Land Cover Data (NLCD), close to one-third of Ayer's land area (approximately 2,000 acres) is forested, a substantial portion of which is identified as prime forest by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The largest contiguous block of forest is located in the north-central area on Snake Hill and down to Pine Meadow Conservation area. A small Floodplain Forest, located east of the Nashua River along Nonaicoicus Brook, is a unique environment for specific species of plants and animals.

Invasive species have become a problem in some of Ayer's open space areas. The invasive purple loosestrife, for example, is found in some of the town's wetlands, and some ponds are filling with invasive aquatic plants and algae. In the absence of natural predators, invasive species can degrade or destroy the habitat of local species.

Fauna



Areas identified as Priority Habitat areas for rare species by the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) are shown in blue.

Ayer's forests are home to common eastern woodland animals, while diverse freshwater areas provide habitat for fish, amphibians and some birds. A thirty-acre beaver pond dam at the power line cut on Snake Hill is mentioned as an important habitat in the Natural Communities and Wildlife Habitat Inventory of Snake Hill in Ayer, Massachusetts (NRWA2002). NHESP (spell out) has documented four species of vertebrates that are endangered, threatened or of special concern in Ayer. Four state-endangered species include the least bittern, blundings turtle, upland sandpiper, wood turtle, and the Eastern box turtle is a species of special concern.

A substantial portion of Ayer has been identified as part of a regional network of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), including the Snake Hill-Long Pond area which lies within the Petapawag ACEC, and the Nonaicoicus Brook-Grove and Plowshop ponds section of Ayer, which is located within the Squannassit ACEC. Twelve species of flora and fauna that are rare, endangered, or of special concern are identified within these two ACECs making them critical wildlife habitat areas. There is very little protected open space within Ayer in the Petapawag ACEC, which is a priority area for habitat conservation – particularly land on Long Pond.

The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has also documented 2,597 acres of core wildlife habitat in Ayer (largely coterminous with ACECs), just over a quarter of which is permanently protected at this time.⁴ The NHESP maintains an inventory of critical habitat areas of statewide significance, which has identified four Priority Habitat areas in Ayer. Most, if not all of these documented areas are related to wetlands and plants that need wet conditions to thrive. Further protection of forested and vegetated wetland areas like vernal pools, bogs and wet meadows could support the long term continuance of rare species in Ayer.

Among the areas that have been identified as significant habitats, the Snake Hill area is a priority for permanent land protection due to its diversity of natural communities, unique geology, size, and location relative to a contiguous core habitat (located largely in Groton). Recreation in this area must be balanced with the need for habitat isolation to protect endangered species. In addition to habitat concerns, it is not advisable to build structures or develop in this area due to soil instability and steep slopes.

Agriculture

Although Ayer was once a farming community, much of Ayer's agricultural land was developed in the last decades of the 20th Century, and the only agriculture that remains today is hay production in the highland areas of town. The 80-acre Eliades farm includes a barn sited in the midst of a rolling hayfield. The former Smith Farm includes an early 19th Century house and a 20th Century dairy barn complex. A portion of the farm was subdivided to create the Autumn Ridge active adult housing development, with the remaining portion, now the Smith Conservation Land, protected through deed restrictions. The Ayer State Game Farm on Groton-Shirley Road was an 87-acre state-owned farm.

The loss of agriculture in Ayer presents new challenges in the creation of a sustainable food system as Ayer is not able to locally source much of its food supply. A **sustainable food system** is a collaborative network that integrates several components in order to enhance a community's environmental, economic and social well-being. It is built on principles that further the ecological, social and economic values of a community and region. While Ayer may not be able to produce all of its own food, there are several actions that could be taken to increase access to affordable, healthy, and sustainably sourced foods. Several ideas that are currently being discussed to promote a sustainable food network include the creation of a community garden to provide all residents with access to planting areas with clean soils, as well finding new vendors and bringing the Farmer's Market back to Ayer.

Scenic Landscapes

The Massachusetts Scenic Landscape Inventory has designated the area between the former state game farm and Snake Hill along the Groton border as a "distinctive landscape" with highest visual and aesthetic quality that is worthy of protection. In the 2000 Nashua River Habitat Report, the Massachusetts Audubon Society has also included the vicinity of Snake Hill-Long Pond as a habitat protection focus area.

The Ayer Reconnaissance Report prepared by the Freedom's Way Heritage Association and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation in 2006 as part of the documentation for establishing the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area identified additional landscapes of importance in Ayer, including MacPherson Road located in an ecologically sensitive and flood-prone area, Frederick Carlton Circle which serves as a main gateway to the town, and the North Washington Street Agricultural Area, as well as some historic sections around downtown Ayer as important heritage landscapes.

⁴ MassGIS, as of August 2017



Inventory of Open Space and Recreational Resources

What is open space?

Parks and gardens – including landscaped parks, land surrounding public buildings, and pocket parks and islands.

Natural and semi-natural green spaces - including habitat, water resource or flood protection areas; woodlands, wetlands, open water, wastelands, steep slopes and rocky outcroppings, and urban wilds.

Green corridors – including river and canal banks, bike paths, and vegetated rights of way.

Outdoor sports facilities – including tennis courts, playing fields, golf courses, athletic tracks, public pools, and multipurpose fields.

Provisions for children and teenagers – including play structures, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball hoops, and other informal gathering areas.

Agriculture – Farms and community gardens

Civic spaces – Civic and market squares, and other hard-surfaced areas designed for pedestrians and public gatherings and events.

Cultural facilities – Cemeteries, churchyards, and historic sites.

Urban forest and green infrastructure – Street trees, landscaping around commercial buildings and parking lots, and rain gardens or other natural stormwater management systems.

Open spaces, recreational facilities, and high quality landscaped greenspaces are critical in providing a healthy living environment, protecting natural resources, and contributing to the aesthetic character of the community. Open space areas may include publicly-owned, and/or privately-owned properties, and comprises both natural areas, as well as passive and active recreational areas. In all, there are close to 1,200 acres of open space that has some form of permanent or temporary protected status, and nearly 1,000 acres that are privately-owned and unprotected.

- There are approximately 867 acres of protected open space in Ayer, including federal, state, and town-owned conservation land, as well as land owned by other government entities or privately-owned and protected as part of a cluster development program. These open space parcels have permanent protection from future development either through a Conservation Restriction (CR) or Article 97 designation under Massachusetts General Laws (MGL) which requires two-thirds vote of the state legislature in order to change from open space or conservation use.
- An additional 79 acres functionally serve as opens space, such as school fields and cemeteries. Owned by the Town of Ayer or nonprofit institutions, they are not protected under Chapter 97 or deed restriction and thus are not permanently protected, however they are unlikely to be developed for another use.
- There are 233 acres of privately-owned land in Ayer that is enrolled in Chapter 61, which enables land to be taxed at a lower rate according to its agricultural, forestry, or recreational open space use. Chapter 61 provides a financial incentive to preserve land as open space, but does not ensure permanent protection from development. The Town has the right of first refusal if Chapter 61 land is to be sold.
- Finally, there are 971 acres of undeveloped land in Ayer which are privately-owned and do not have any form of protection from future development. Portions of this land may be unbuildable due to environmental constraints such as wetlands, flood hazards, or steep slopes, but the remainder is unprotected and potentially developable.



Ayer Open Space Inventory		
Name	Owner/Manager/Use	Acres
Permanently Protected Open Space		863.1 acres
Oxbow National Wildlife Area	Federal	252.5
Commonwealth of Massachusetts Former State Game Farm	State	126.0
Shepley's Hill	Devens / MDFA	44.7
Pine Meadow Conservation Area (former Erskine Property)	Con Com	129.0
Tooker Property (Extension of Pine Meadow Conservation Area)	Con Com	5.5
Northeast Milling	Con Com	33.6
Mini-French	Con Com	25.8
Snake Hill Road Conservation Area	Con Com	7.5
Tithe	Con Com	0.5
Long Pond	Water Dept.	29.7
Phelps	Water Dept.	17.0
Nemco Way	Water Dept.	15.0
Spectacle Pond Well	Water Dept.	11.6
Fletcher Pond	Water Dept.	0.5
Autumn Ridge Development (former Smith Farm)	Conservation Restriction	55.0
Pond View Estates on Westford Road	Conservation Restriction	46.1
Nonacoicus Brook	Conservation Restriction	8.1
Orion Park Drive	Conservation Restriction	7.3
Balchs Pond	Conservation Restriction	0.5
Pirone Park	Recreation	20.9
Sandy Pond Beach	Recreation	1.3
Groton Conservation Trust*	Groton	16.6
Rocky Hill Wildlife Sanctuary (portion located in Ayer) *	Mass Audubon	7.4
Ayer Dog Park (Currently under Construction)	DPW/Recreation	1.0
Institutional Open Space (Not Permanently Protected)		79.4 acres
Ayer Shirley Regional High School Athletic Fields	Recreation	42.2
Woodlawn Cemetery*	Cemetery	10.5
St Mary's Cemetery/ Church Property*	Cemetery	21.6
Other institutional potential open space*	Nonprofit/institution	5.1
Temporarily Protected Open Space (Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B)		232.5 acres
Ayer Sportsmen's Club / Snake Hill Road	Chapter 61B	99.7
Eliades / Old Groton Road*	Chapter 61A	55.8
Matheson / Snake Hill Road*	Chapter 61A	43.0
Maxant-Delke / Willard Street*	Chapter 61A	1.2
Cowley / Sandy Pond Road*	Chapter 61A	1.0
Cowfield Realty Trust (Calvin Moore) / Snake Hill Road*	Chapter 61	25.5
Riley Jayne Farm / Pleasant Street*	Chapter 61	6.2
Tracey / Shaker Road*	Chapter 61	0.1
Privately-Owned Unprotected Open Space		971.4 acres
New England Power Company*	Utility	138.2
Undeveloped residential or commercial land (total)*	Private	833.2
Pending Open Space Parcels		38.9 acres
Bennet's Crossing***	Conservation Restriction	0.6
Stratton Hill Road***	Conservation Restriction	7.4
Sandy Pond Road**	Conservation Restriction	10
Pleasant Street School***	Conservation Restriction	0.7
Kohler Place***	Conservation Restriction	20.2
Total Open Space (All Types)		2,185.3 acres

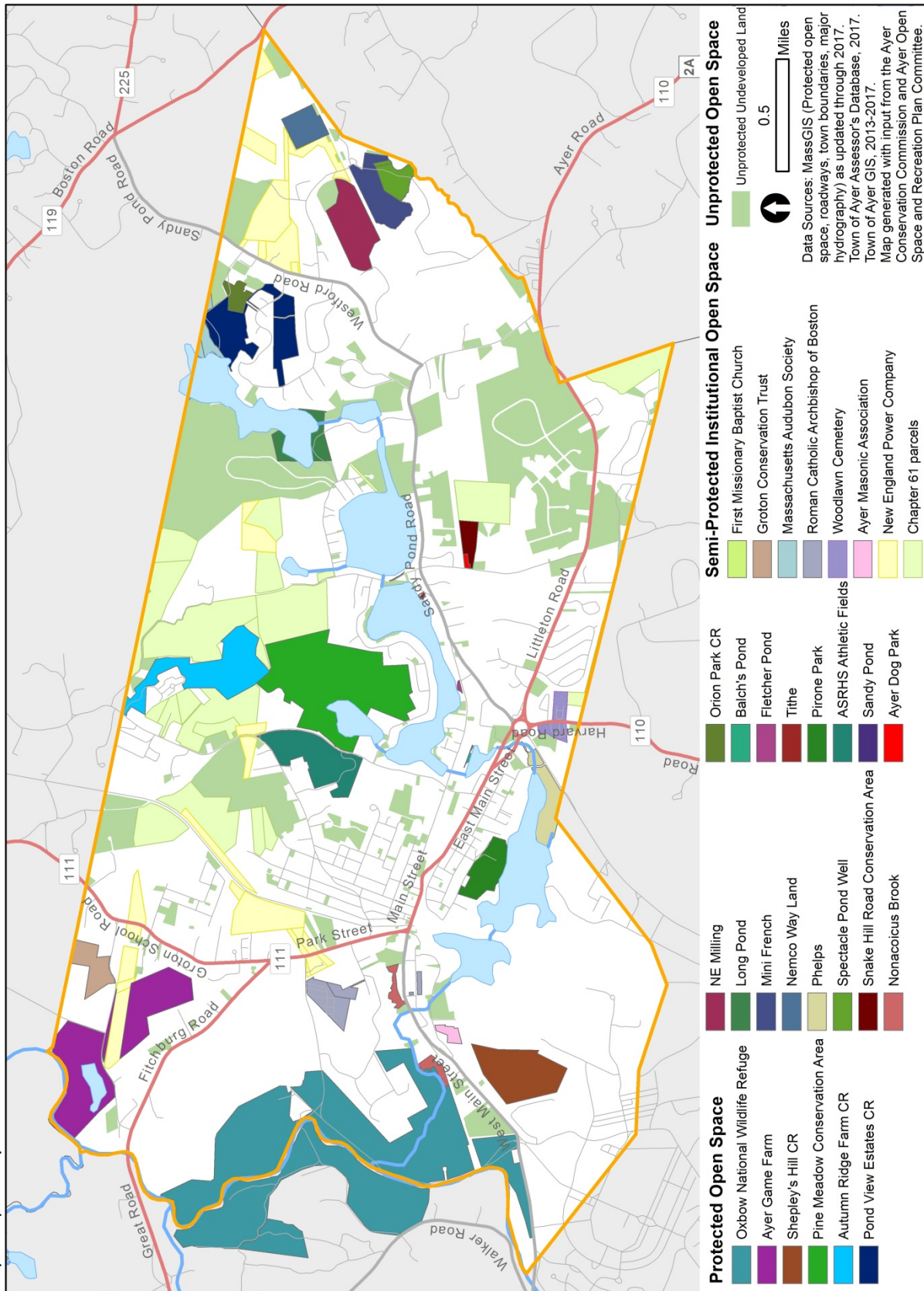
Data Sources: MassGIS, *Assessor Database 2017, **Community Preservation Plan, ***Conservation Commission 11/30/2017

Notes: Lands identified as under the management of a Conservation Restriction may be privately owned, with CRs placed on them as a regulatory requirement during permitting for development. 61A lands < 5 acres are located in both Ayer and neighboring communities.



Ayer, Massachusetts

Open Space by Level of Protection



Map prepared by: Community Opportunities Group, Inc.
Last Updated: 12/6/2017



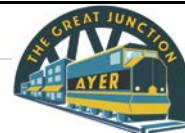
Recreation



The playground at Pirone Park is a well-loved community resource with an uncertain future. The playscape must be replaced in upcoming years, but a funding source to perform the project has not yet been identified.

Ayer's significant natural resources, such as its ponds, rivers, and trails, offer numerous recreation opportunities. A network of trails through open space areas in Ayer provide opportunities for hiking, picnicking, and birdwatching, while the ponds and rivers provide kayaking and educational opportunities. Despite Ayer's abundance of surface waters, there is limited public access for boating and fishing. However, youth sports and other recreation offered through the Ayer Parks Department and the schools, which place a significant demand on local resources, as well as private recreation, such as fitness clubs, Gun & Sportsmen Club, the Hawk's Nest Disc Golf facility, enhance the recreational offerings.

Recreation Resources in Ayer	
Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Nashua River Rail Trail is a former railroad right of way owned by DCR that begins in downtown Ayer and travels 11 miles through the towns of Groton, Pepperell and Dunstable. The trail offers a 10-foot wide paved surface, open to pedestrians, bicyclists, inline skaters, wheelchairs, and cross-country skiers. The Ayer Greenway Committee has developed several trails through the Pine Meadow Conservation Area. There are also formal trails in Shepley's Hill and in the vicinity of Long Pond. Informal trail networks extend through the State Game Farm, and connect to larger trail networks in the Groton Town Forest and Audubon Rocky Hill Wildlife Sanctuary in Groton. The nearest hiking access in the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge is located in Shirley and Harvard. Devens Regional Trails Initiative (2001) envisions the development of pedestrian connections with neighboring communities, including a trail to Ayer via Shepley's Hill.
Water-based recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sandy Pond is the main public swimming area for Ayer, with the Town Beach located on its southwestern shore. It is also extensively used for boating and fishing, including ice fishing in the winter. On the Nashua River, the closest canoe launch to Ayer is located just across the border in Shirley, at the Ayer Ice House Dam. Another launch is located further south on Hospital Road in the Harvard portion of Devens. There is public boating access on Spectacle Pond, located on the border with Littleton. The boat launch is located in Littleton on Route 119.
Sports and Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sandy Pond Beach: swimming, volleyball, basketball, playground, picnic areas Pirone Park: Playground, basketball courts, soccer fields, baseball fields, picnic area Ayer-Shirley Regional Schools: Basketball, soccer, baseball, tennis, track, playground Devens: 36 hole disc golf course at Shepley Hill, Willard Field, sports fields, playground, cross-country skiing Recreational programming is offered through the Ayer School District, Park Department, youth sports programs, and the Ayer Youth Outdoors Program.
Private Recreation and Fitness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ayer Gun & Sportsmen's Club: 100 acres with woods, ponds, and fields, as well as a function hall supporting a variety of sports activities and events. Sporting goods retailers: Hawks Nest Disk Golf and Fresh Ayer Sports Fitness clubs: Nashoba Valley Fitness Center, Ross Fitness, Signature Fitness Motor sports/road racing at former Moore Army Airfield at Devens



Ayer Conservation Fund

Community Preservation Act

MGL 44B, CPA enables towns to raise local revenue which is partially matched by state funds, specifically to be used to meet local needs for open space, recreation, historic preservation, and affordable housing. Ayer initially adopted a 3% surcharge on local property tax bills which was reduced in 2002 to 1%, generating approximately \$200,000 per year in combined local and state revenue through CPA, raising a total of \$3.4M since 2002. At least 10% of CPA funds must be spent in each of the following program areas:

1. Open Space & Recreation
2. Historic & Cultural Resource Preservation
3. Affordable Housing

The remaining 70% of funds may be spent in any of the program areas. In Ayer, these funds have supported affordable housing construction and preservation, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the Pleasant Street School and Nutting Building, Town Hall, Sandy Pond School, recreation facilities at Sandy Pond, Pirone Park, and other sites, greenway and habitat projects, and a fund for open space acquisition. A Community Preservation Plan was prepared in 2009 to guide the Community Preservation Committee in making recommendations for the use of CPA funds, which must be approved by Town Meeting.

At Special Fall Town Meeting in 2017, residents voted to establish a conservation fund, pursuant to Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 40, Section 8, to be administered by the Town Treasurer and overseen by the Conservation Commission. Funds may be expended by the Conservation Commission for any purpose authorized under M.G.L. CH. 40, Section 8, for conservation purposes. The conservation fund may be funded through gifts, donations, and bequests, in addition to funds appropriated by the Town. The purpose of the conservation fund is to provide the Town with the resources to purchase open space and recreational lands; including the Town's ability to exercise its right of first refusal when open space lands currently held under M.G.L. Chapter 61 become available for purchase. Without the fund, any expenditure for the acquisition of open space and/or recreation lands would require Town Meeting approval, which can be a lengthy process and typically precludes the Town from being able to act quickly enough to purchase available land on the open real estate market and within prescribed time limits established under M.G.L. Chapter 61.

The Conservation Fund was capitalized with a one-time \$500,000 appropriation from the

Community Preservation Act (CPA) Open Space fund. The transfer of funds was approved at Special Fall Town Meeting in 2017, and is likely to be an ongoing funding source for the conservation fund. The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is one of Ayer's most critical long-term funding sources for the preservation of natural, historical, and cultural resources. To date, open space and recreation projects have represented 57 percent of the expenditures CPA funds and have been used to fund the Oak Ridge Drive expansion open space acquisition, greenway projects, and the invasive vegetation study, as well as upgrades to Sandy Pond beach, Pirone Park, and the Paige-Hilltop School park.

Ayer CPA Fund Balance (as of 5/17)

Local Revenue 2002-2017	\$2,145,483
State matching funds 2002-2016	\$1,298,233
Total Revenue 2002-2017	\$3,443,716
Funds Committed 2002-2017	\$2,297,599
Estimated Available Funds (as of 5/17)	\$1,146,117

Source: Community Preservation Coalition, Community Opportunities Group



Historic Resources

Ayer's historic resources represent a wide range of periods important in Ayer's history, including Native American, Colonial and Federal rural settlement, 19th Century industrial village, and early-mid 20th Century influenced heavily by Fort Devens.

Initially part of Groton, Ayer was sparsely settled throughout the 18th and early 19th Centuries until the arrival of railroads in the mid-19th Century brought an influx of population. Housing stock greatly expanded during this period, and new churches were built. Civic and institutional buildings including schools, town hall, and library, were constructed in the late 19th Century, after Ayer was incorporated as a town in 1871 and a fire

destroyed much of the commercial center in 1872. Camp Devens (later renamed Fort Devens) was established in 1917 as a military training center, and by 1940 was the largest military installation in New England. Large numbers of military personnel and families lived in Ayer for nearly 75 years, heavily influencing all aspects of the town. Fort Devens was decommissioned in 1996 and is now administered by the Devens Enterprise Commission.

A total of 61 sites in Ayer have been listed on the National or State Historic Registers, including two National Register districts (located on Fort Devens and Downtown) and numerous individual buildings (many of which are located within these districts). A listing with the National Register does not automatically protect structures from inappropriate alteration or demolition. However, it creates the potential for property owners to qualify for historic preservation tax credits and prevents public agencies from using federal funds to demolish a historic structure, except to address an imminent health or safety hazard.

*Ayer is located at the center of the **Freedom's Way National Heritage Area**, which comprises 46 communities in Massachusetts and New Hampshire extending from Malden on the east to Winchendon on the west, linked by historic events that helped to shape American traditions and culture. The Freedom's Way National Heritage Association works to identify, promote, and advocate for the preservation of natural, cultural, and historic assets in communities throughout the region.*

Ayer's Historic Resources

Listed Historic Resources



Ayer's Town Hall won a Preservation Award from the Massachusetts Historic Commission in 2003.

- **Main Street Historic Mercantile District.** Located on Main Street between Park Street and the Main Street B&M Railroad Bridge, includes 22 two- and three-story structures mostly dating to the late 19th and early 20th Century.
- **Fort Devens Historic District.** Bound by El Caney Street, Antietam Street, Sherman Avenue, MacArthur Avenue and Buena Vista Street, includes 58 properties from the early 20th Century, a large portion of which are located in the Ayer portion of Devens.
- **Ayer Town Hall.** Originally constructed with funding provided by Dr. James Cook Ayer, of Lowell, in 1876. In 2003, the Town Hall underwent a significant rehabilitation and restoration project, including accessibility accommodations and preservation of both interior and exterior historic features. In addition, the town used a Historic Landscape Preservation Grant to develop a small pocket park, which is the only public gathering space located in Downtown Ayer.
- **Pleasant Street School.** Built in 1894, the school was a three-story, wood frame Colonial Revival building. The building was subsequently converted to affordable senior housing.
- **The District School #11.** The district school was a one-room wooden schoolhouse originally built in 1792, and the current brick building dates from 1868. Located at the junction of Sandy Pond, Westford and Willow Roads, the District School #11 is owned and managed by the Sandy Pond School Association, and was added to the National Register in May, 2017.

List continues on next page.



Ayer's Historic Resources

Buildings and Landmarks not listed on National or State Registers



Ayer's library was originally constructed in 1894, but has been altered and expanded project since its initial date of construction.

According to the Assessor's database, there are approximately 1,115 residential and commercial structures constructed prior to 1967 and potentially eligible for inclusion on State and National registers.⁵ Inventory forms have been submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for over 250 buildings and structures throughout the town, including homes, commercial buildings, churches, bridges, and military facilities.

- **Neighborhoods** with collections of late 17th through early 20th Century buildings and farms identified on MACRIS inventory forms and in the Reconnaissance Report, including "Pingryville", Ayer/Groton Road, Pleasant/Washington, and East and West Main Streets.
- **Public buildings**, in particular the Ayer Library, c. 1894, on East Main Street, and the historic Central Fire Station at 14 Washington Street built in 1934. The fire station and the post office, also built in 1934, were both constructed as Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects.
- **Camp Stevens** on the Nashua River was used as a training ground for the Union Army during the Civil War. The site is marked with a stone monument.
- **Cemeteries.** St. Mary's (est. 1857) and Woodland Cemetery (est. 1859).
- **Railroad artifacts**, including a 1925 switch tower, turntable, bridges, and abandoned rail lines, are physical remnants of Ayer's history as an important railroad junction.
- **Scenic roads and stone walls** throughout many of Ayer's more rural roads, in particular one that runs from Stratton Hill to the Sportsman's Club.
- **Historic artifacts, documents, and records.** Many objects which document the history of Ayer are located at the Library, Town Hall, Fire Station, and DPW building, as well held in private collections.

Archeological Sites



Grady Research Occupies one former ice house site.

- **Native American Sites.** According to the Reconnaissance Report, Ayer has ten documented Native American sites, mostly located at Devens along the Nashua River. There are likely to be more areas with Native American archeological resources, especially in the area along MacPherson Road and the Nashua River.⁶
- **Nonacoicus Plantation** is thought to be the site of battle in the King Philip's War.
- Remnants of the Sandy Pond Ice House located on Sandy Pond Road and the Horgan Ayer Ice House located on West Main Street on the Shirley town line.
- Remnants of the Shaker Village Foundations on Snake Hill Road

Ayer has an appointed Historical Commission pursuant to M.G.L. Ch.40C. Its mission is to identify, evaluate, and protect the historical resources of the town through education and outreach. The Commission has completed the first phase of an inventory of historic resources, published a book on the history of Ayer, and refurbished a historic monument commemorating Camp Stevens and an 1896 Women's Temperance Christian Union (WTCU) fountain located in front of Town Hall. Projects in progress include an oral history program and a self-guided walking tour of downtown. Ayer has not established any *Local Historic Districts* under M.G.L. Chapter 40C, which would provide the Historical Commission with authority to monitor and regulate demolition, exterior alterations and new construction within local historic districts.

⁵ Assessor's Database, FY 2017

⁶ Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program, 2007 Reconnaissance Report, Page 10



Historic Neighborhoods in Ayer

Downtown – Pleasant Street/Washington Street Area



The tree-lined streets in this neighborhood are characterized by a diverse collection of well-kept homes constructed in a variety of architectural styles. There is a mix of late 19th and early 20th century homes in Queen Anne, Shingle, and Colonial Revival styles. While Washington Street boasts slightly grander homes set on larger lots, most of the homes in the neighborhood were originally constructed as single family residences. The homes on Pleasant Street and some of the small side streets tend to be slightly smaller in scale and include some multi-family housing. In recent years, the area has seen some infill development as well as the redevelopment of the Pleasant Street School into the Nashoba Valley Nursing home. The neighborhood has long been prized for its proximity to Downtown Ayer.

West Main Street

The West Main Street neighborhood is a small enclave of residential properties on both the north and south sides of West Main Street. On the north side of the street, there is a line of modest Greek revival houses and multifamily buildings with Greek revival details. Many of the buildings in this area have been altered, but include a range of 19th century styles such as Italianate and Stick Style. On the south side of West Main Street is the St. Mary's Catholic Church campus, also an important local feature and the neighborhood known as the Acre; once used to house many of Ayer's immigrant communities.

Grove Pond

The Grove Pond Neighborhood was formed in a grid street pattern from 1850-1860. Compactly and comfortably situated between East Main Street (to the north), Grove Pond (to the south), and the Ayer Junction Rail Yard (to the west), the Grove Pond Neighborhood accommodates a noteworthy and diverse collection of historic residential homes of various architectural types spanning the mid-late 19th century and early 20th century. The neighborhood provides lifestyle choices for a range of income levels, as well as single family and multi-family dwellings. The neighborhood retains its traditional, compact, walkable, human-scale, and still relatively affordable qualities and character; however new and (more auto-oriented lifestyle) residential infill development is increasingly eroding the traditional neighborhood pattern and associated social cohesion.

Pingryville

Pingryville was settled shortly after the American Revolution by the Pingry family. The Pingry family purchased a gristmill in the area and converted it to a sawmill; eventually it was used to produce nails. No traces of the area's mill history remain today. However, a series of homes, the oldest dating back to 1780, have been inventoried in the area. The homes, located at 55-62 Willow Road, represent a mix of federal Greek revival styles. The area was served by a schoolhouse, which still exists on Willow Road, though it is no longer used for educational purposes.



Devenscrest

Devenscrest is a planned residential community built before World War II and represents among the last wood structures from Devens. The development is on the south side of Littleton Road and abuts land to the west that was formally part of the military base. The streets are lined with small lots upon which there are mostly World War II-era homes. A few houses have been replaced by modest mid-20th century ranch houses and fewer have been replaced by late-20th century, 2-story, Colonial-style homes, but the area largely remains a mix of single, two-, and multi-family housing.

Sandy Pond Cottages

Several small cottages remain around Sandy Pond. Constructed in the early 20th century, Ayer residents took the street car out to their summer cottages – along Central Avenue, hence the extra width of that road. Several of these cottages remain, having been turned



Cultural Resources

Public Resources

Ayer-Shirley Regional School District

The towns of Ayer and Shirley share a regional public school district since 2011. Four school buildings include the Page Hilltop Elementary School and the Ayer-Shirley Regional High School both located in Ayer, and the Lura A. White Elementary School and Ayer-Shirley Regional Middle School located in Shirley. Renovation of the high school was completed in 2016. In addition to K-12 academic curriculum, the public school offers an early childhood program at both elementary schools and extracurricular programs at the middle and high schools, including sports, drama, music, art, robotics, and mock trial. A non-profit program offers before- and after-school care to pre-school and elementary aged children in Ayer through the school district. A private education foundation serves the public school district with grants of up to \$300,000 for enrichment project and programs.

Ayer-Shirley Community Education provides a continuing education program through the regional school district. Courses, seminars, recreational activities and outings for community-members of all ages occur outside of school hours on evenings and weekends. Offerings include fitness, art, nature walks, ESL, technical skills, and other personal improvement workshops.

Ayer Library

The Ayer Library serves approximately 80,000 people annually. The building was constructed in 1894, with an addition built in 1997. In addition to circulating books and other media, the Library offers access to online reference resources, public computers, museum passes, and educational, cultural, and social programming for all ages. There is a meeting room which accommodates up to 70 people, as well as a heavily-used study room. Space is adequate for now, although there may be a need to expand capacity to increase library usage and future visitation. The Library is supported by the Friends of the Ayer Library organization.

The Nutting Historical Room at the Ayer library holds a variety of historical collections that describe the history of Ayer and Devens, and genealogical resources. The Library houses photographs, maps, documents, vital records, year books, town reports, and local newspaper issues dating back to 1869. There is also a large and unique military collection including books and photographs. The Nutting Room has capacity to accommodate expansion of the historic collections.

The Council on Aging, The Center



The Council on Aging is dedicated to improving the quality of life for seniors, providing a range of social activities, fitness, educational programs, and luncheons at the Community Senior Center, commonly known as The Center. The Council on Aging also offers services and outreach to provide assistance to seniors for accessing transportation, health care, economic assistance, and navigating other challenges. Programming and services incorporate Ayer residents of all ages who seek to participate as volunteers or to obtain support on behalf of

elderly family members. Approximately 1,200 people are served per year, including seniors, people with disabilities, and intergenerational residents.

The facilities occupied by the Center are located in a 2,000 square foot space that includes kitchen/dining/ living room, and a 2,000 square foot common space that is used for social activities, classes, and lunches. There is no private office space. With capacity for 70 participants, the Center has a waiting list for people who wish to participate in social and enrichment activities. A few times a year the Center coordinates larger events that take place at the School or Fire Station.

Ayer Cultural Council

Town-appointed volunteers oversee funding from the state and town to provide cultural activities and events. Some of the types of programs funded through the Ayer Cultural Council (ACC) include field trips and after-school programs, performing and visual arts, interpretive sciences, history and nature walks. Individuals, community groups and organizations can apply for funding. Every three years the ACC gathers community input to develop funding priorities and criteria.

Institutional Resources

Freedom's Way National Heritage Area

The Freedom's Way National Heritage Area has its headquarters at Devens, serving 45 communities in north central Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The program identifies a wide range of natural, cultural, and historic resources throughout the region, providing listings of assets by community and type, a map, and a calendar of events. The organization has undertaken several initiatives in partnership with other cultural and natural resource-based organizations to highlight specific resources and histories and to build connections among member communities.

United Native American Cultural Center

A volunteer organization dedicated to cultural enrichment, education, and support for Native American people. Located at Devens, they offer programs and cultural experiences featuring Native American crafts, artwork, and traditional ways.

Fort Devens Museum

A civilian operated nonprofit museum dedicated to preserving the history of the men and women who served at Camp Devens, Fort Devens, and the current Military Training Center at Devens. The Fort Devens Museum aims to show the landscape of past and present forts, encampments, and training ground, as well as the social, cultural, and economic impact of Devens upon surrounding communities.

Natural Resources Education

Although most programs are not directly located in Ayer, there are educational classes and events sponsored by organizations focused on natural resources that extend within Ayer's boundaries. The Nashua River Watershed Association and the Friends of the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge offer programs such as nature walks and ecology classes for children, adults, and families throughout the year. The Merrimack River Watershed Association may also provide educational resources that would be of interest to Ayer.



Formative Issues

Assets and Opportunities

- **Water quality protection.** Ayer's prolific water resources - including surface and groundwaters - provide drinking water for residential and commercial users, unique habitat, and recreation opportunities. Continued efforts are needed to clean up and prevent further contamination, and to combat threats from invasive species and development impacts.
- **Open space protection.** While Ayer is home to uniquely natural resource areas that support several endangered species and define the town's heritage, a relatively small proportion of the town's open space has been permanently protected from future development. In particular, areas that have been identified as critical habitat, that provide connections for wildlife or public access to existing conservation lands, water resources or cultural and recreational amenities, scenic landscapes, and areas that support groundwater protection should be prioritized for acquisition, donation, or in seeking conservation restrictions. The Town should consider these priorities in evaluating land that is coming out of Chapter 61 protection, or where there might be open space set aside as part of development proposals. The Town might also approach key landowners to coordinate purchase or donation of conservation restrictions.
- **Access to open space for recreation.** Ayer's natural resource areas are sometimes described as a "well-kept secret". Despite Ayer's proximity to the Nashua River and its network of ponds and forests, public access points such as boat launches or walking trails are lacking or are not well marked or known throughout the town.
- **Coordination.** Facilities such as the library, Council on Aging, Community Schools, and other cultural institutions offer programs, community gathering spaces, and cultural offerings that could be better utilized by the community. More coordination between these programs and other community services, schools, local businesses, and municipal departments, boards and committees, could help to increase awareness and to allow for cross-promotion and sharing of resources.

Challenges and Weaknesses

- **Local capacity.** Recreation and cultural programming are heavily dependent on volunteers, as funding is very limited to support staff coordination or facilities maintenance. Cost-efficiency has helped to keep programs affordable for residents; however additional sources of funding need to be identified to enable them to remain sustainable or to expand to serve a broader public. More volunteers are needed to help support and maintain Ayer's open space, recreation, natural, cultural, and historical resources. Reviving the Greenway Committee and other resource-based committees may help provide additional oversight and capacity.
- **Facilities gaps.** The Town is lacking in indoor recreation or social gathering spaces, as well as pocket parks or neighborhood playgrounds near the downtown or other places residents can walk to. In addition, the Center has severely inadequate facilities for their senior recreation programs. These limitations can make registration an issue impacting all age groups in Ayer. Further, there is also a lack of public access to Ayer's ponds and rivers for boating, fishing, or other recreation.
- **Finance limitations.** While the Town has set aside Community Preservation Act Funds for open space acquisition and established an open space trust fund that can more readily respond to opportunities to purchase land, challenges such as high land costs remain. By working in advance with owners of targeted properties and by pre-emptively appropriating CPA funds for the purpose of purchasing open space properties, the Town is in a better position to purchase land for conservation or recreation purposes.
- **Inadequate development controls.** Ayer's subdivision control and zoning bylaws do very little to limit development in ecologically and environmentally sensitive areas in town. Conservation zoning and performance standards requiring the utilization of Low Impact Development techniques, particularly with respect to on-site storm water management would be beneficial. Better tracking of Conservation Restrictions is also needed.



Goals and Strategies

Goal R-1	Protect Ayer's natural resources, including surface and groundwater, habitats, and unique landscapes.
Strategy R-1.1	Advocate for clean-up of MGL Ch. 21e sites by seeking remediation funds, incentivizing private investment for projects involving clean-up of contaminated sites, and raising awareness of pollution in Ayer's soils and waterways.
Strategy R-1.2	Prioritize open space acquisition that will serve to protect sensitive natural resources, such as parcels adjacent to existing protected open spaces and drinking water supply areas, as well as lands reverting from the MGL Ch. 61 program.
Strategy R-1.3	Coordinate volunteer efforts to enhance stewardship of open spaces. Hikers, boaters, bird watchers fishers, and other outdoor recreation enthusiasts can help identify and monitor concerns, as well as participate in habitat restoration projects and the removal of invasive plants.
Strategy R-1.4	Encourage qualifying property owners to utilize the MGL Ch. 61 program and work with landowners in sensitive natural resource areas to consider Conservation Restrictions on their properties.
Strategy R-1.5	Identify a sustainable funding source, such as Community Preservation Act funds, and earmark open space funds in the Town's Annual Budget to authorize the purchase of open space, should a Chapter 61 or other critical open space parcel become available.
Strategy R-1.6	Coordinate with both Watershed Associations, MassDevelopment, US Fish & Wildlife, Mass Fisheries & Wildlife, Mass Audubon, and the Town of Groton to support conservation initiatives within or adjacent to Ayer.
Strategy R-1.7	Explore formation of a land trust or partnership with a regional land trust to help facilitate timely acquisition of open space.
Strategy R-1.8	Employ best practices to ensure that zoning and subdivision regulations and DPW specifications adequately protect Ayer's natural resources from contamination or erosion and encourage the protection of priority open space.

Goal R-2	Expand access to recreational opportunities for all residents.
Strategy R-2.1	Prioritize the expansion of open space and/or public access easements around ponds and streams in Ayer to facilitate public access for recreational use such as kayaking launches and hiking trails.
Strategy R-2.1	Expand the network of trails where appropriate, particularly where they can connect recreational, cultural, and neighborhood amenities, as well as regional open space resources. Ensure that trails will remain in existence by seeking public access easements where trails currently traverse privately owned land.
Strategy R-2.2	Identify opportunities to create pocket parks within neighborhoods that are not currently walkable to, or served by, a public park. Pocket parks should be designed with input from prospective users and should consider the needs of users of all of ages and abilities.
Strategy R-2.3	Address and budget for the need for indoor recreation space by finding or a creating a suitable indoor space to allow for youth sports and adult recreation to be adequately served.
Strategy R-2.4	Identify a location that could accommodate the space needs of the Senior Center to expand capacity for services and programs.
Strategy R-2.5	Provide signage, maps, and online information about the location of Ayer's parks, trails, and recreational assets, including water access for boating and fishing.



Goal R-3	Highlight and promote Ayer's historical, natural, cultural assets that define the Town's character.
Strategy R-3.1	Utilize CPA funds to create a Historic Preservation Plan to identify historic resources, local needs and priorities, and to create a long-term strategy to ensure that Ayer's heritage endures and is documented, preserved, and promoted.
Strategy R-3.2	Develop a strategy for completing Ayer's inventory of historic objects, landscapes, and structures for submission to the Massachusetts Historic Commission.
Strategy R-3.3	Identify funding and regulatory incentives to encourage the rehabilitation and reuse of historic buildings.
Strategy R-3.4	Install interpretive elements, such as signs, markers, and monuments to highlight important stories and features in Ayer's landscape.
Strategy R-3.5	Continue to archive, preserve, and digitize artifacts and records that document Ayer's history through the Nutting Room at the Library or other publicly accessible facilities
Strategy R-3.6	Investigate the adoption of a Local Historic District or Neighborhood Conservation District to ensure sensitive historic resources are preserved.

Goal R-4	Expand organizational capacity and awareness of Ayer's recreational and cultural programming.
Strategy R-4.1	Increase coordination between Schools, Community Education Program, Library, Senior Center, Recreation Department, Cultural Council, and other entities that offer cultural, educational, and recreational programs, to facilitate cross-marketing and broaden awareness of what is happening in town.
Strategy R-4.2	Increase the amount of part time staff time available to coordinate outreach efforts for volunteer-based activities.
Strategy R-4.3	Establish a volunteer coordination web page to alert people to volunteer opportunities, as well as open seats on Town Boards and Commissions.
Strategy R-4.4	Connect with local businesses and nonprofit groups to cross-market and invite sponsorship of recreation and cultural events.
Strategy R-4.5	Utilize display space in public buildings for art, historic artifacts, or other cultural exhibits.
Strategy R-4.6	Explore opportunities to develop a Community Center to address insufficient indoor recreation facilities for youth sports and recreation as well as senior recreation offered through the Council on Aging.

Goal R-5	Make Ayer more sustainable by promoting the concept of a local food system and increase access to local food.
Strategy R-5.1	Identify leadership to be responsible for coordinating the return of the Ayer Farmer's Market. A committee of interested residents, Town staff, representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, local artisans, crafters, farmers, and other parties could be established to coordinate vendors and promotion.
Strategy R-5.2	Identify a location to establish a community garden with plots available to residents, particularly those who do not have access to private open space, to provide planting areas with clean soils, varied sun exposure, and a water source.

