

# **TOPSHAM MAIN STREET VILLAGE PLAN**

## ***APPENDIX A***

# **EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT**

**MAY 31, 2006**

**MRLD, LLC**

# EXISTING CONDITIONS

## Overview

The Existing Conditions Report is divided into three primary sections:

- I. Physical Conditions
- II. Economic and Housing Conditions
- III. Traffic Conditions

The information detailed in the Existing Conditions Report, along with the Document Review and the tabulated results from the Public Forums (see Appendix A) is the foundation for developing the Main Street Village Plan. This information directly informs and guides the Plan and recommendation for changes to zoning, land uses, dimensional standards, physical improvements and traffic mitigation.

## I. PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

### Introduction

The starting point of the Existing Conditions Report is an analysis of physical conditions in the Main Street Study Area (Map 1), specifically The Main Street / Route 201 corridor. The physical conditions review is visual in nature with supporting text and summaries. Most of the effort was spent on the ground documenting conditions and then translating this information into photographs, tables and figures.

Main Street runs approximately two miles from the Androscoggin River north to the I-295 overpass. The Main Street Village area includes approximately 244 lots and roads totaling approximately 550 acres, representing 2.32% of Topsham. The study area minus roads is approximately 488 acres. The total study area including the surrounding “zone of influence ” includes 717 lots

totaling 1,350 acres. The average lot size in the study area is approximately 2.00 acres.

The Main Street Village area is defined by the Lower, Middle and Upper Village Zones as well as a portion of the Commercial Corridor Zone near the Main Street / 196 intersection and an isolated portion of the Residential 1 Zone known as the Forest Drive neighborhood. The Main Street Village area zones are depicted on Map 2, and in more detail, on Maps 3 and 4.

Land uses and the style and scale of the landscape and architecture vary along Main Street. The five zones along Main Street are principally defined by existing built patterns. But these patterns are beginning to shift as noted in the analysis. The Main Street Village Plan is a tool for guiding the changes in land use patterns to aid the implementation of appropriate land uses and physical design.

Main Street is dynamic in scale, natural features, architectural styles and land uses. The challenge of the Main Street Village Plan is to create a sense of place for the heart of Topsham, while respecting the character, opportunities and limitations of the different areas along Main Street.

The physical conditions review is divided into the following categories:

1. Zoning and Land Use
2. Streetscape
3. Architecture
4. Landscape / Civic Spaces / Gateways
5. Infrastructure

Map 1: Topsham Main Street Village - Study Area (550 acres +/-)



## I. Zoning and Land Use

### Why Analyze Zoning Land Use Patterns

It is important to understand the underlying zoning and land uses in the Main Street Village area for a number of reasons:

1. In village settings, particularly areas with historic buildings, the use of the land and the appearance of the property and architecture do not always match. For example, a building may look like a single family home, but it may comprise two dwelling units and a home occupation. In the case of the Bowdoin Mill, the use has changed from manufacturing to professional uses, but the appearance is still a traditional mill typology.
2. The scale and general visual quality of new and different uses in historic structures may be not always be visually apparent, but the change of use often requires careful attention to allowable uses and the necessary design standards so that the new use “fits” the character of the neighborhood.
3. The greatest potential for conflict in village areas often occurs between different land uses (regardless of the look of the architecture) due to changes such as parking, signage, lighting and any increase in activity and noise.
4. Modern zone maps are based on land use, and in general, zone lines follow existing land uses. For example, there is a clear distinction in the scale and style of architecture between the Middle Village and the Commercial Corridor Zones. However, neighborhood character can start to blur when zones lines are moved and new uses encroach into an existing neighborhood, creating not only land use conflicts, but also disparities between the visual quality and the scale of the architecture and the land use. General and specific performance standards are needed to mitigate between uses of different scale and intensity, such as a commercial use abutting a residential use.
5. There are situations where a lot is redeveloped in the middle of a zone with an allowable use. In this case, specific and general design standards are important for

ensuring that the intensity as well as the visual character of the use is compatible with the neighborhood.

6. By studying land use, patterns and trends in land use can be recognized. These patterns need to be encouraged or discouraged.
7. By studying land use, one learns that what you see is not always what you get. To allow for a village to evolve and become sustainable in terms of housing, economy and quality of life, both land use and visual character need to be inventoried to recognize existing and potential areas of conflict as well as opportunities and constraints for achieving certain goals. In doing so, appropriate zoning and design guidelines can be developed to guide growth and manage change in a manner contributing to rather than detracting from a cohesive village character.



*An example of an historic residence in the Middle Village “absorbing” the contemporary use of a home office.*



*A grandfathered commercial use in the Middle Village.*

While people are fond of Dairy Queen and other grandfathered businesses in other zones that are incongruous in land use and visual quality, a new business with a similar look and site design would most likely face opposition. The Zoning Ordinance and Site Plan Review include standards, which would not allow this kind of development to take place. However, there are mechanisms, such as waivers and zone changes, which could allow a proposal not too dissimilar in appearance to be approved.

No one in the public forums described Monument Place as the historic or contemporary village center, probably because it lacks typical village components such as tree lined streets, buildings parallel with the street, curbs, sidewalks and parking behind buildings. The buildings and uses in the area of Monument Place, 196 and Main Street (the Monument Place neighborhood) represent a diversity of uses, including restaurants, insurance agencies, condos, apartments, single-family homes, auto repair shops, beauty salons and a tire dealership. This area includes the most diverse range of uses within the smallest “neighborhood” along Main Street.



*Does this look like a village? Does this function as a village?*

The Monument Place neighborhood has the potential to become a place that looks and functions like Topsham’s village center, particularly with the proposed Town Hall, the realignment of Monument Place (and associated pedestrian improvements), and the nearby post office. This area also backs directly to the Woodside neighborhood. Monument Place holds the same redevelopment potential as the Lower Village 15 years ago. Any redevelopment in this area should be careful to preserve the

diversity of uses, while creating a more defined village form. If the Commercial Corridor Zone along Main Street is given a new name such as “Village Center Zone”, the Monument Place neighborhood is a precedent for meeting the purpose of such a new zone.



*Does this look like a village? Does this function as a village?*

What is important to understand about the Monument Place neighborhood, and in the general analysis of land use patterns in relation to built form, is that it reflects a disconnect between what a village is supposed to look like and how a village functions. This area may not look like a village, but it is vibrant and highly functional. Ideally, form and use compliment each other. It could be argued that the Monument Place neighborhood and the Lower Village are equally successful village areas.

**Study Area Zoning**

The study area is broken into five zones, Lower Village, Middle Village, Commercial Corridor, Residential 1 and Upper Village as noted on Map 2.

**Table 1: Zones and Area Information**

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b># Lots</b>	<b>Avrg. Lot SF</b>	<b>Min. Rqrd. Lot Size SF</b>
LV	16.16	41	16,988	7,500
MV	31.1	50	27,007	15,000
CC	79.46	48	72,309	20,000
UV	350.25	53	287,931	20,000
R1	11.29	52	9,583	20,000

*Note: No roads or ROW in calculations.*

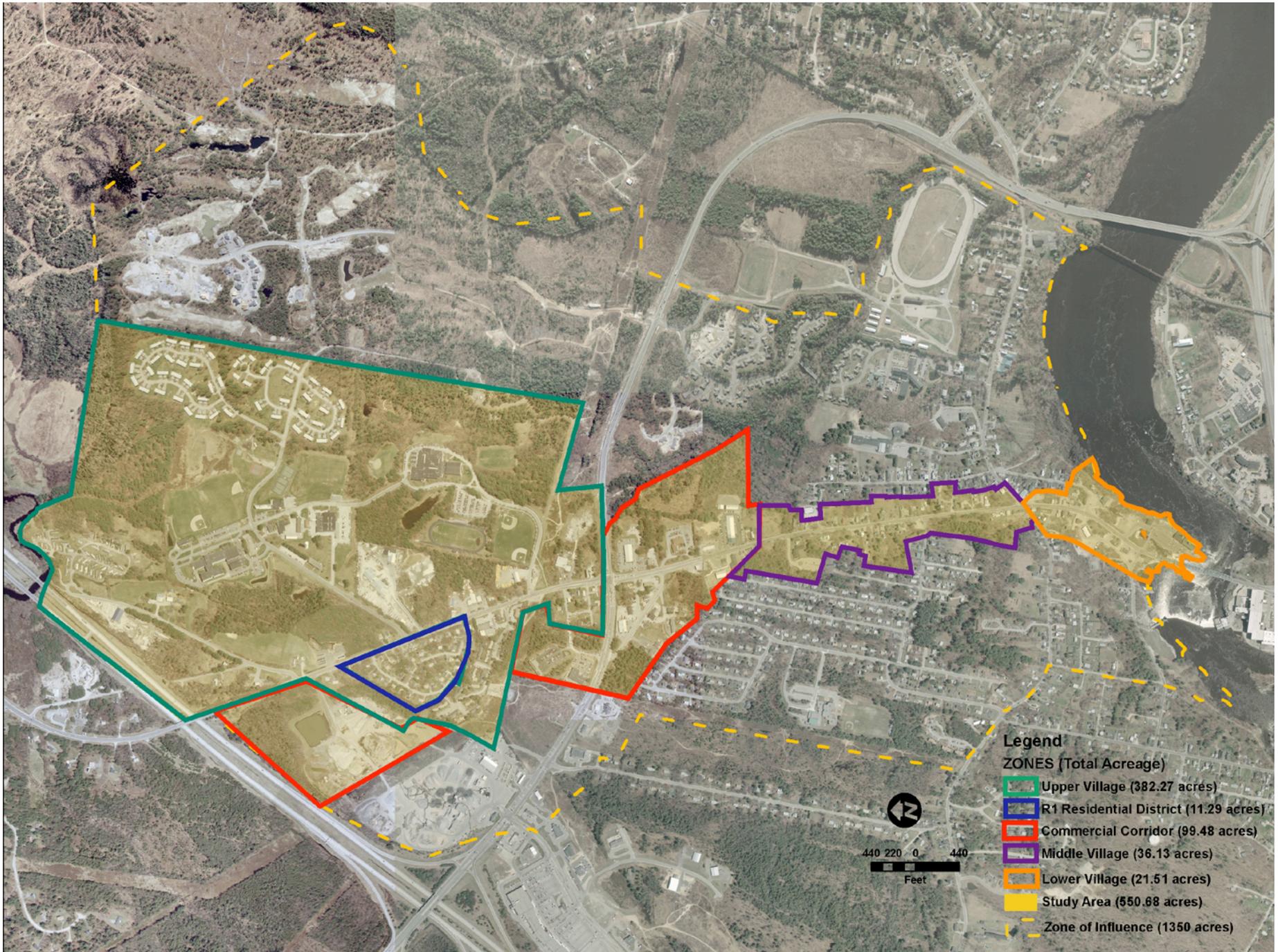
**Main Street Village Area and Town Land Use Comparisons**

Figures 1 and 2 below detail the land use types and area for the study area and the town respectively. Subsequent maps detail land use type by actual location.

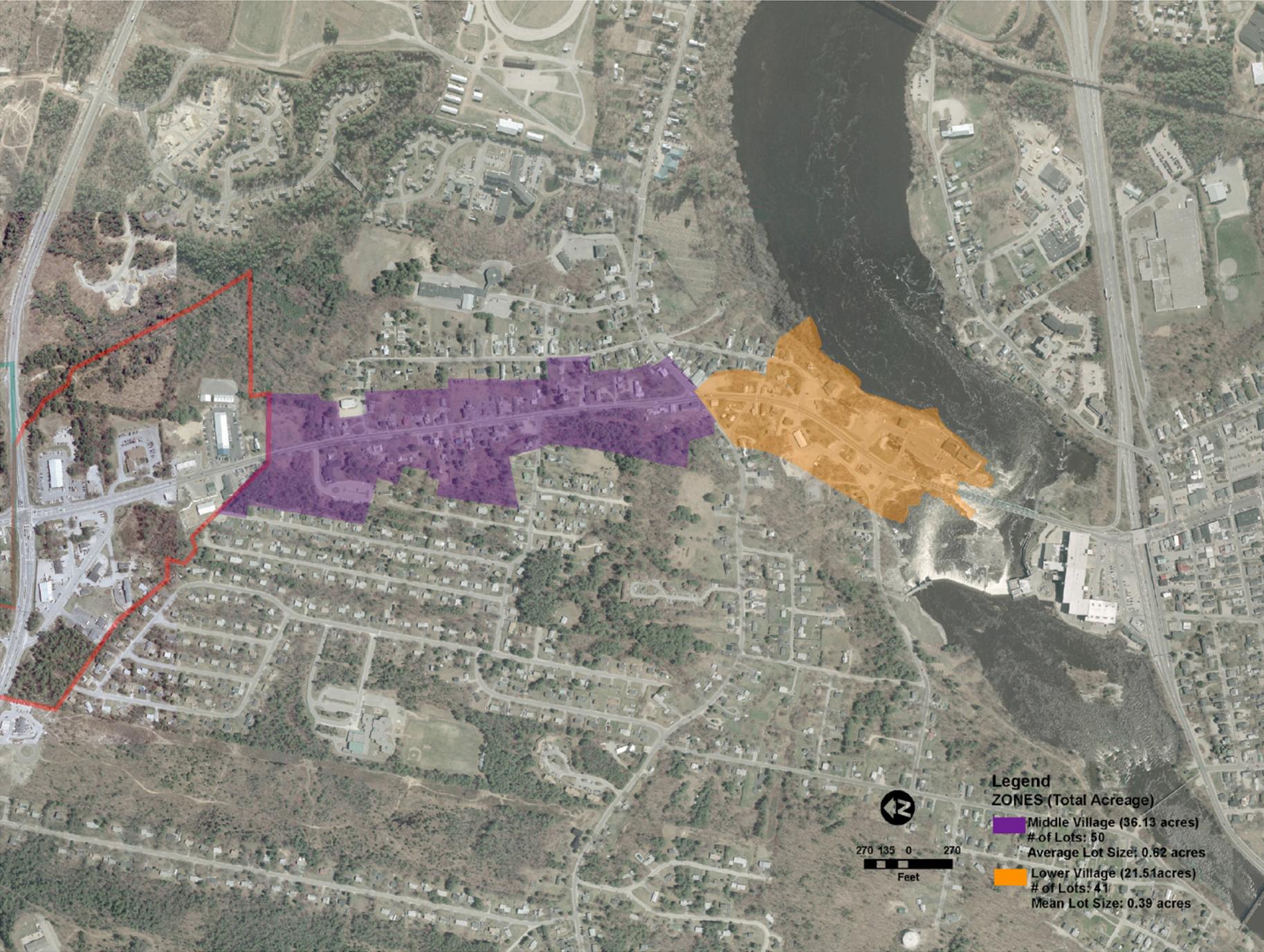
The focus of this report is the Main Street study area, but there are a few notable comparisons between the study area and town wide land uses reinforcing the fact that the study area already includes many of the key ingredients of a village center.

1. Topsham includes approximately 3,573 housing units (as detailed in Section II below) and the study area includes approximately 563 housing units or 15.8% of the total number of units. If the housing units in “the zone of influence”, particularly the Woodside, The Highlands and Elm Street neighborhoods are included in the percentage of housing units in the Main Street Village area, a majority of Topsham’s homes would be located within a 15 minute walk of Main Street. Not including the zone of influence, residential land use, is 24% of the land use in the village. Housing densities in the Main Street Village Area allow for

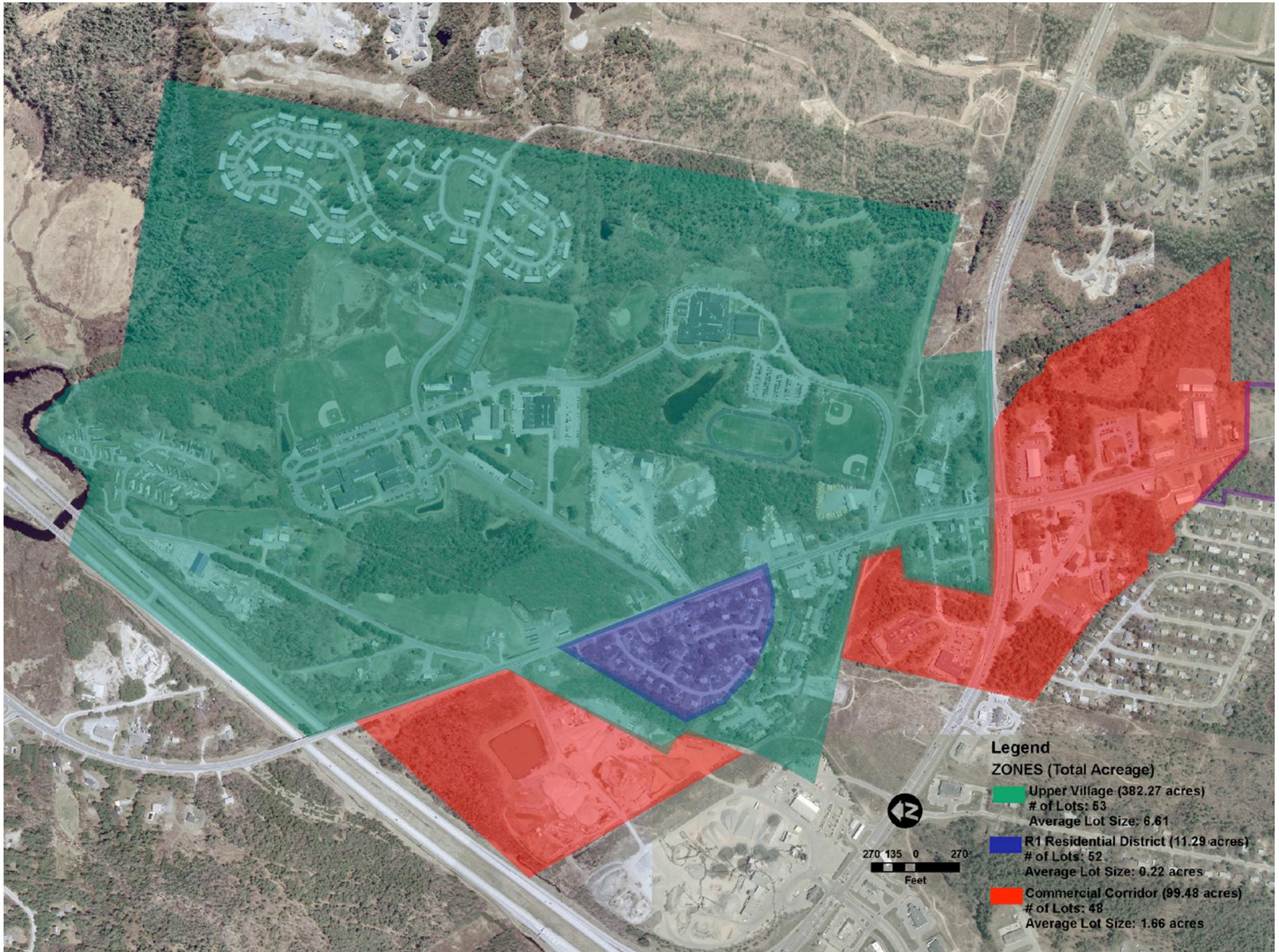
Map 2: Topsham Main Street Village - Zoning



Map 3: Topsham Main Street Village – Detail of Zoning South of 196



Map 4: Topsham Main Street Village – Detail of Zoning North of 196



tight knit neighborhoods within walking distance of open space, civic buildings and commercial uses.

2. Schools, commercial, mixed-use and religious uses are far greater in percentage as a ratio in the study area than in the town as whole, emphasizing that critical community elements are focused in the study area.
3. Vacant land, land either available for conservation or development, is far greater in percentage as a ratio in the town versus the study area. However, if the BNAS Annex is included in the vacant land category in the study area, then the potential “opportunity sites” percentage in the town and the study area is 27% and 19.5% respectively. The BNAS Annex is 13% of the study area and is the acreage with the most potential for change. In terms of this study, the Annex rises to the top as a priority site for potential large-scale change. In turn, the intensity of development of the Annex in the Upper Village may also contribute to existing traffic problems. The impact of change, be it large or small, is more acute within the Main Street Village Area than less dense outlying areas.
4. Because vacant land or potential redevelopment sites are scarce in the Main Street area (with the notable exception of lands in the Upper Village) an emphasis must be placed on carefully planning opportunity sites for open space or (re)development. Given the general tight-knit nature of the Middle and Lower Village, site and economic development sensitive zoning and design standards are critical for maintaining and improving quality of life issues. Redevelopment and adaptive re-use are the more likely scenarios in the Lower and Middle Villages as evident by the dramatic, but positive changes in the Lower Village and the less visible, but no less important changes in land use in the Middle Village.
5. The amount of land area dedicated to roads is approximately proportional between the study area and the town. The prevalence, even distribution and high visibility of this “land use” make it a strong potential unifying factor in the study area if specific and required standards are created for:

- A. Sidewalks
- B. Streetscape elements
- C. Trees and landscaping
- D. Signage

Roads, in conjunction with the appropriate scaled architecture, building setbacks and streetscape elements, are opportunities to create pedestrian scaled “outdoor rooms” within the study area. Roads in more rural, less dense areas of Topsham, should be subservient to the rural visual character. Roads in the Main Street Village Area should not be subservient, but carefully integrated and embraced as part of the overall sense of place.



*Townhouses in the R1 Zone north of 196. The Main Street Village Area includes a range of housing types including manufactured homes, historic single-family homes, multi-unit apartment buildings, grandfathered “accessory” apartments and condominiums. This variety creates a range of densities and affordability levels.*

## Land Use Patterns by Zone

The following Figures 1-14 and Table 3 detail the different land uses within the five zones in the Main Street Village area.

Commercial and residential land uses are further analyzed in Figures 1-14 by zone by the actual range of specific land use types, such as a single-family home versus a four-unit building. These nuanced analyses provide a more accurate depiction of existing and projected patterns (except in the R1 Zone where only residential uses are shown.)



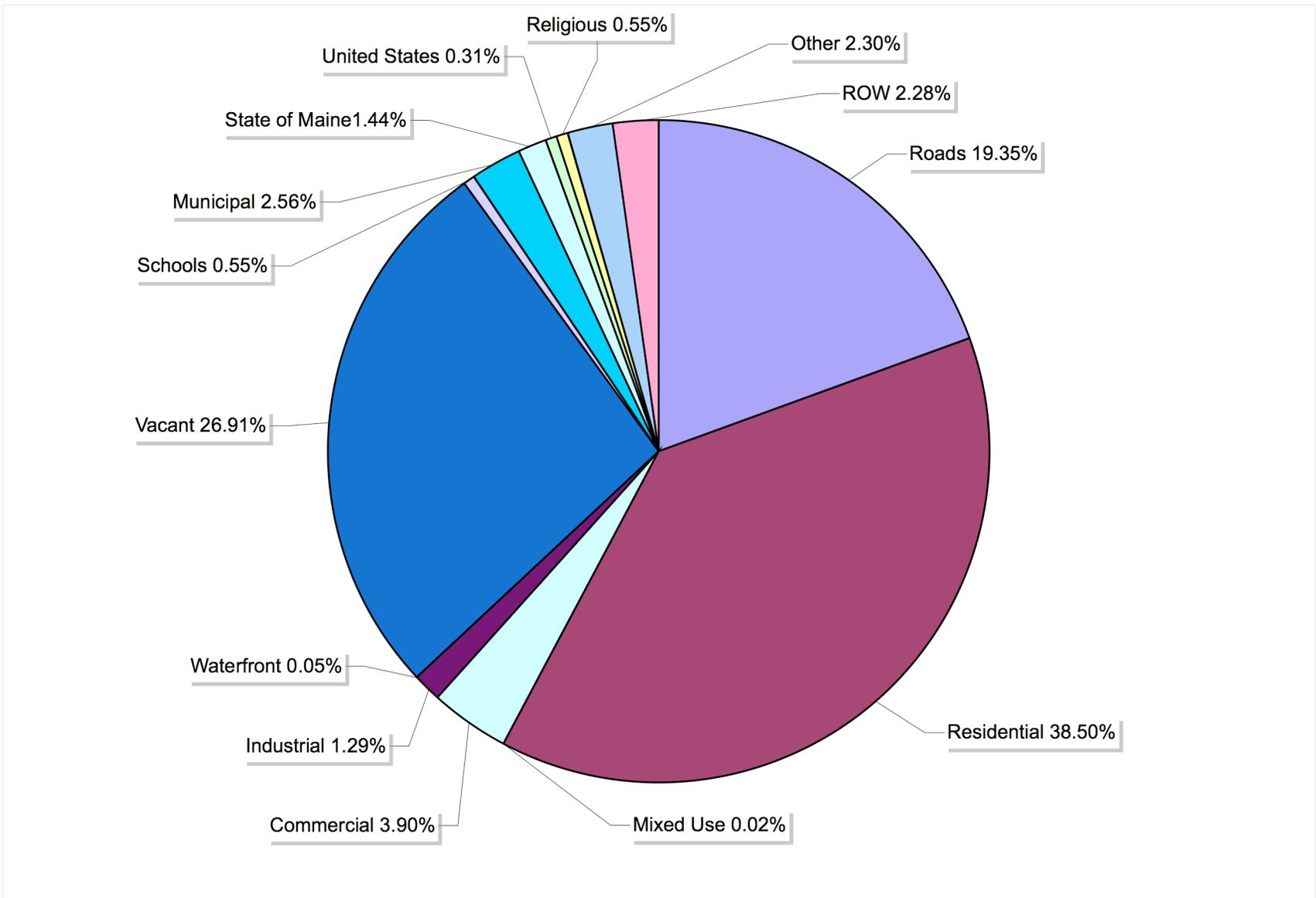
*The Commercial Corridor includes several large-scale land uses. This dealership recently expanded south into the Middle Village Zone through a Zone Map amendment.*



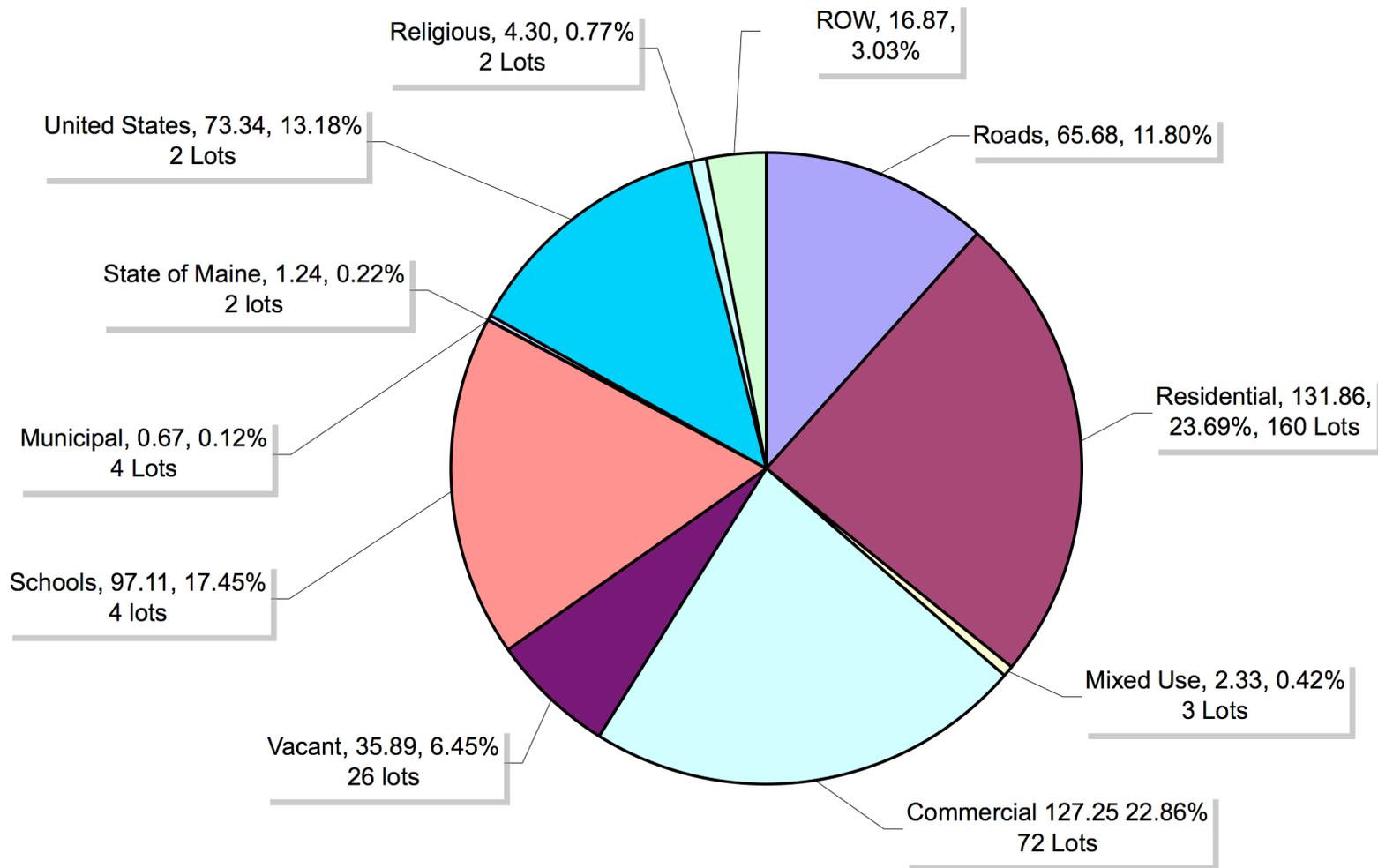
*This building in the Middle Village includes professional offices on the first floor and a residential unit on the second floor. The intensity of the land use, scale of the development and general visual character works reasonably well. The Zoning Ordinance is unclear whether a similar project could currently be developed in a new building in the Middle Village. Note, that while the building is placed close to the street, the building is located at an intersection and the building should be located adjacent to both roads with the parking behind the building.*

***For the purposes of the Main Street Village Plan, “mixed-use” is defined as a building with both residential and non-residential uses.***

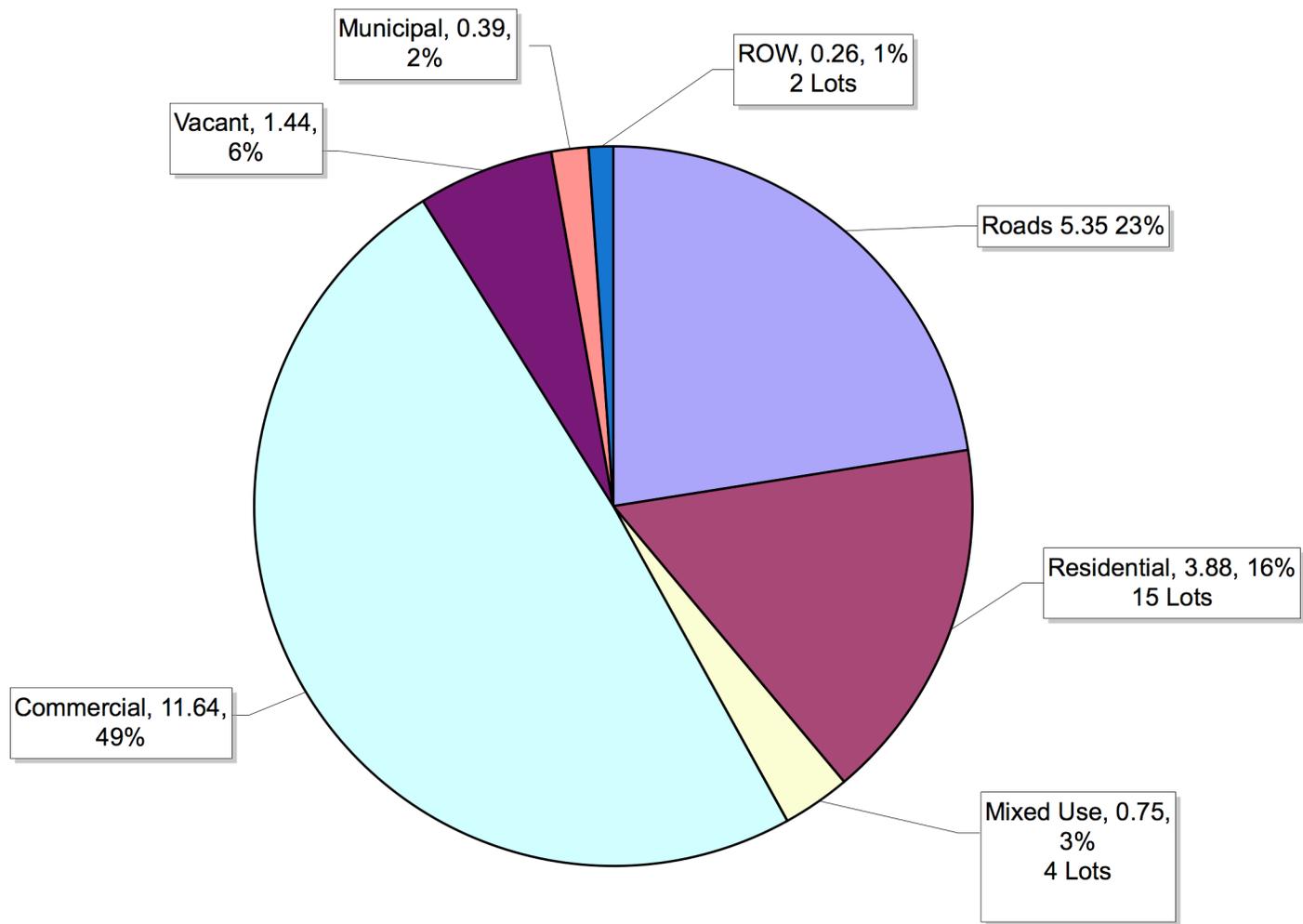
**Figure 1: Town of Topsham Land Uses 23,958 Acres**



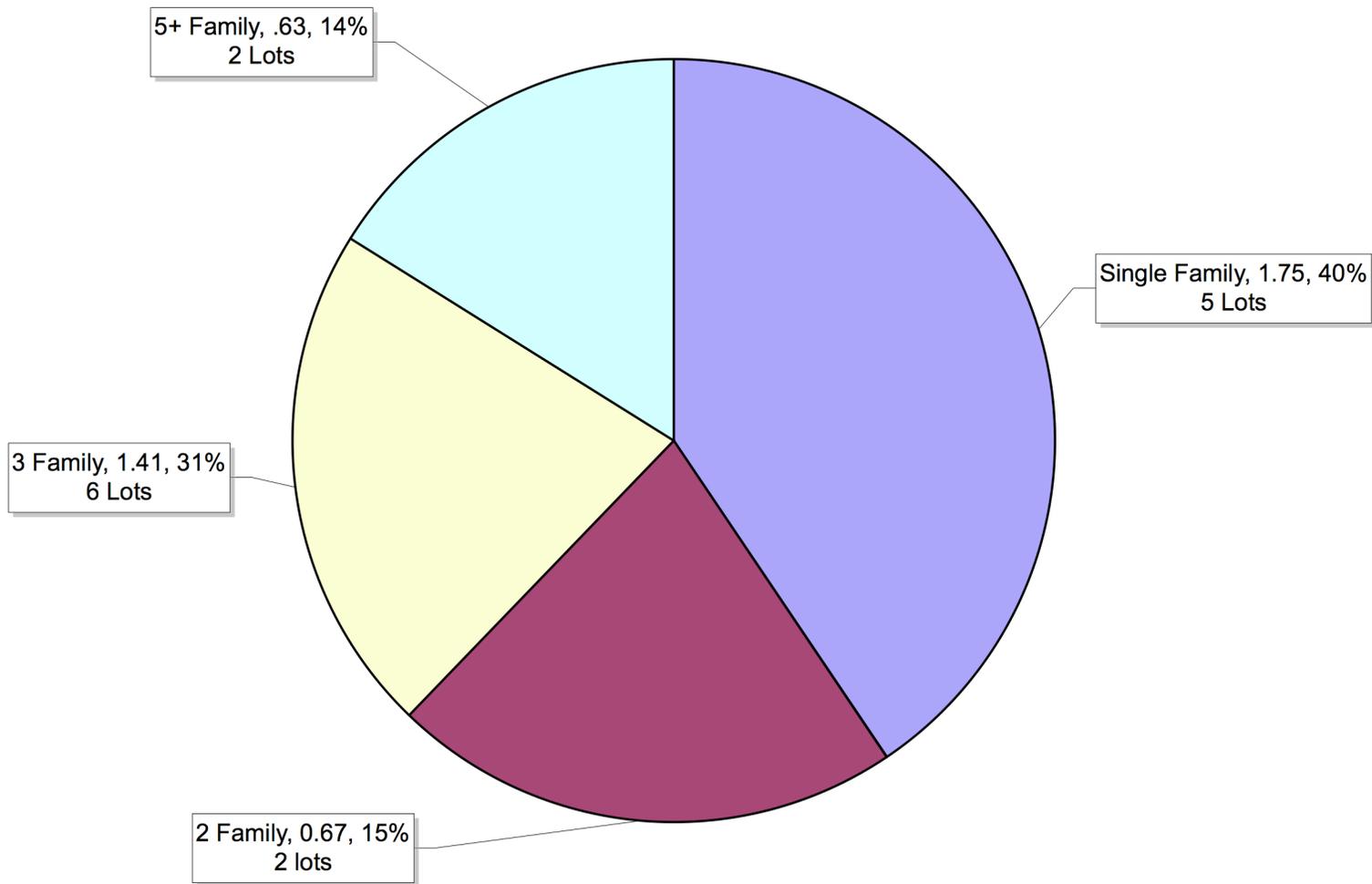
**Figure 2: Main Street Village Area Land Uses 550 Acres +/-**  
 (Calculations are approximate)



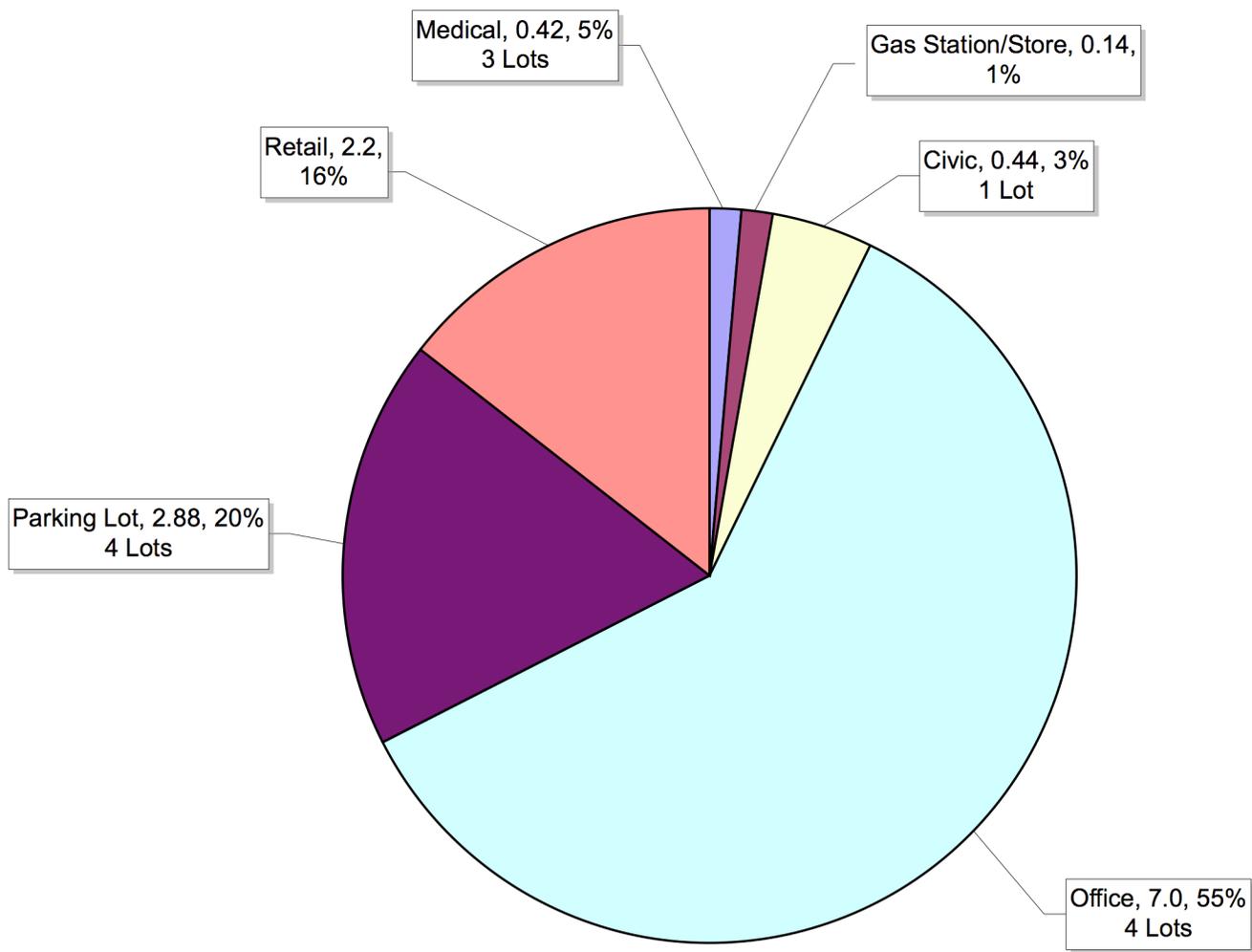
**Figure 3: Lower Village Land Uses 23.70 Acres**  
(Calculations are approximate)



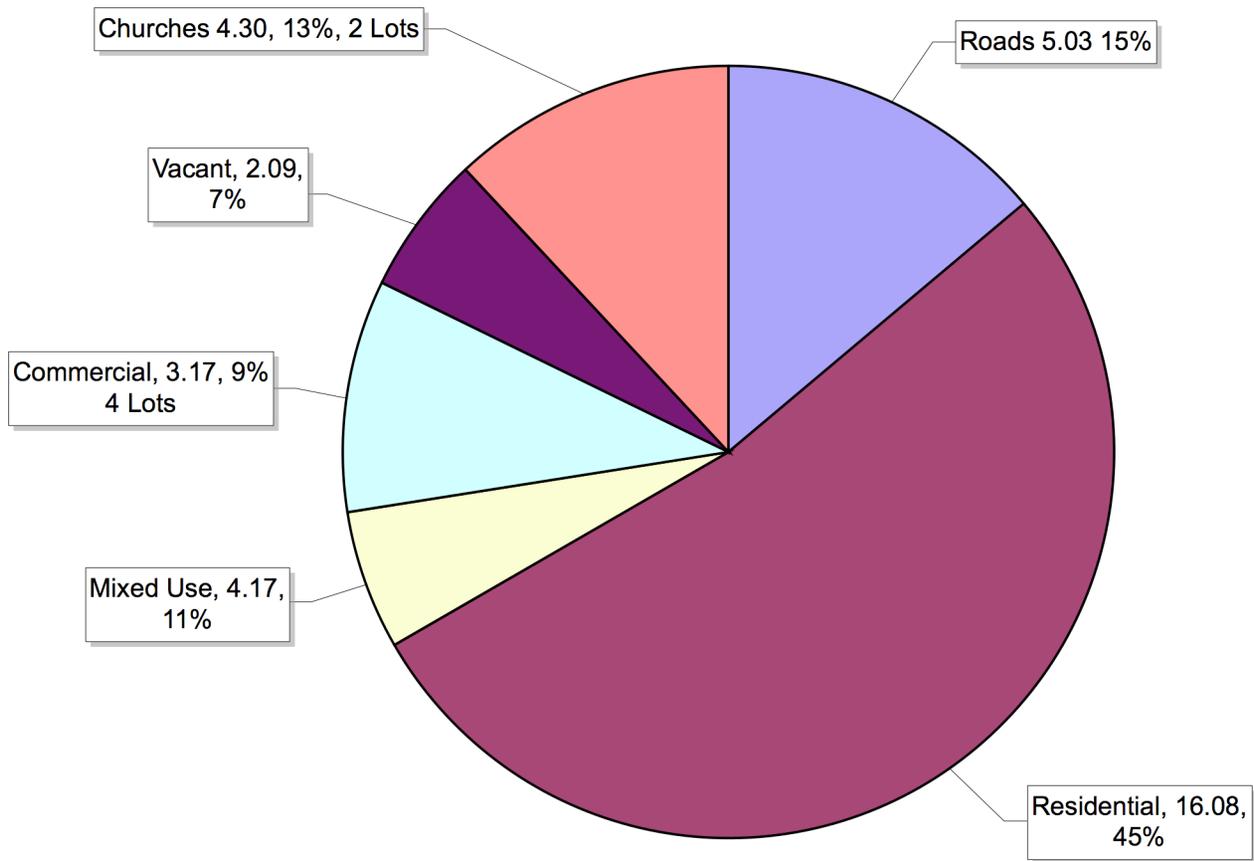
**Figure 4: Lower Village Residential Land Uses 3.87 Acres**  
(Calculations are approximate)



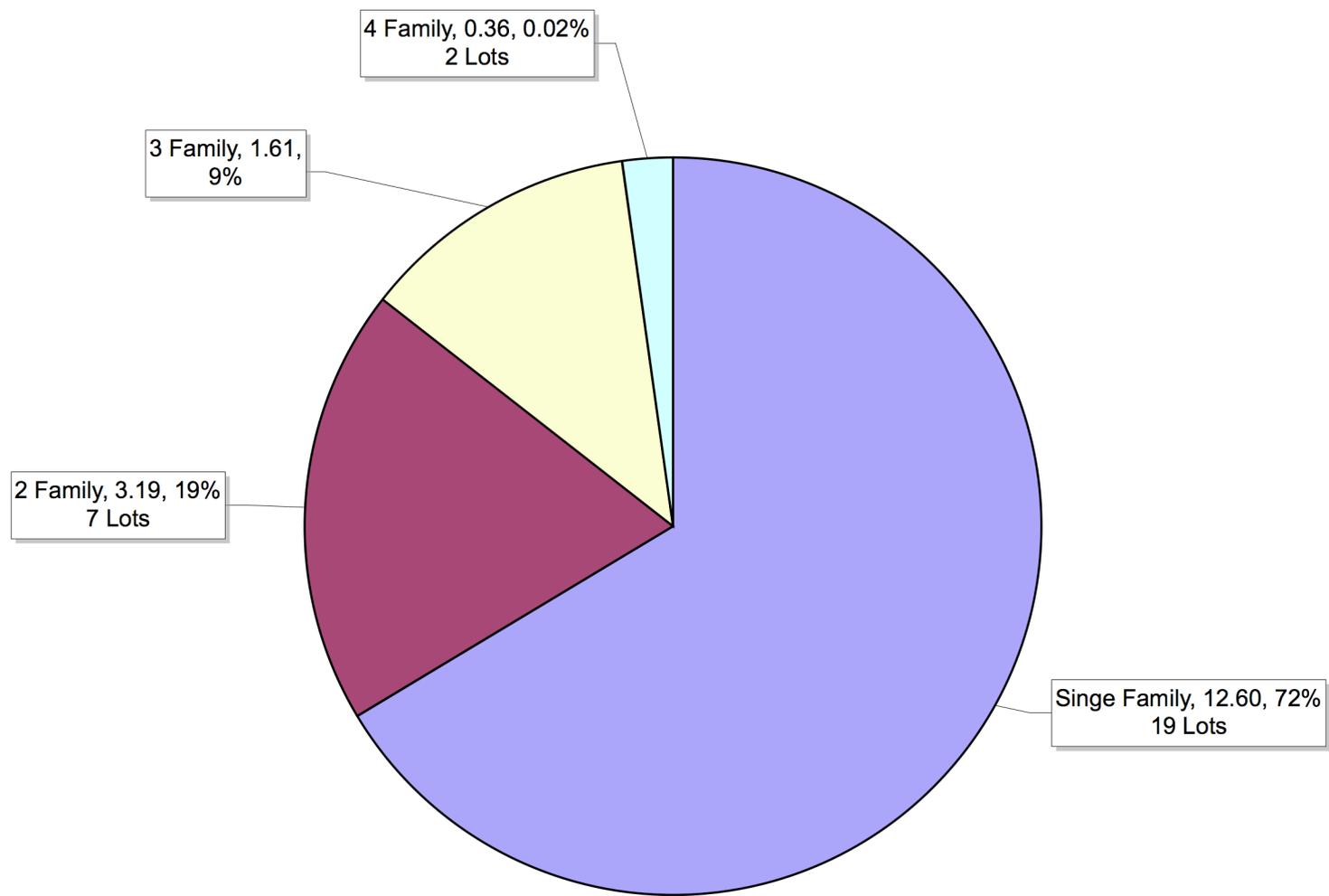
**Figure 5: Lower Village Commercial Land Uses 12.22 Acres**  
(Calculations are approximate)



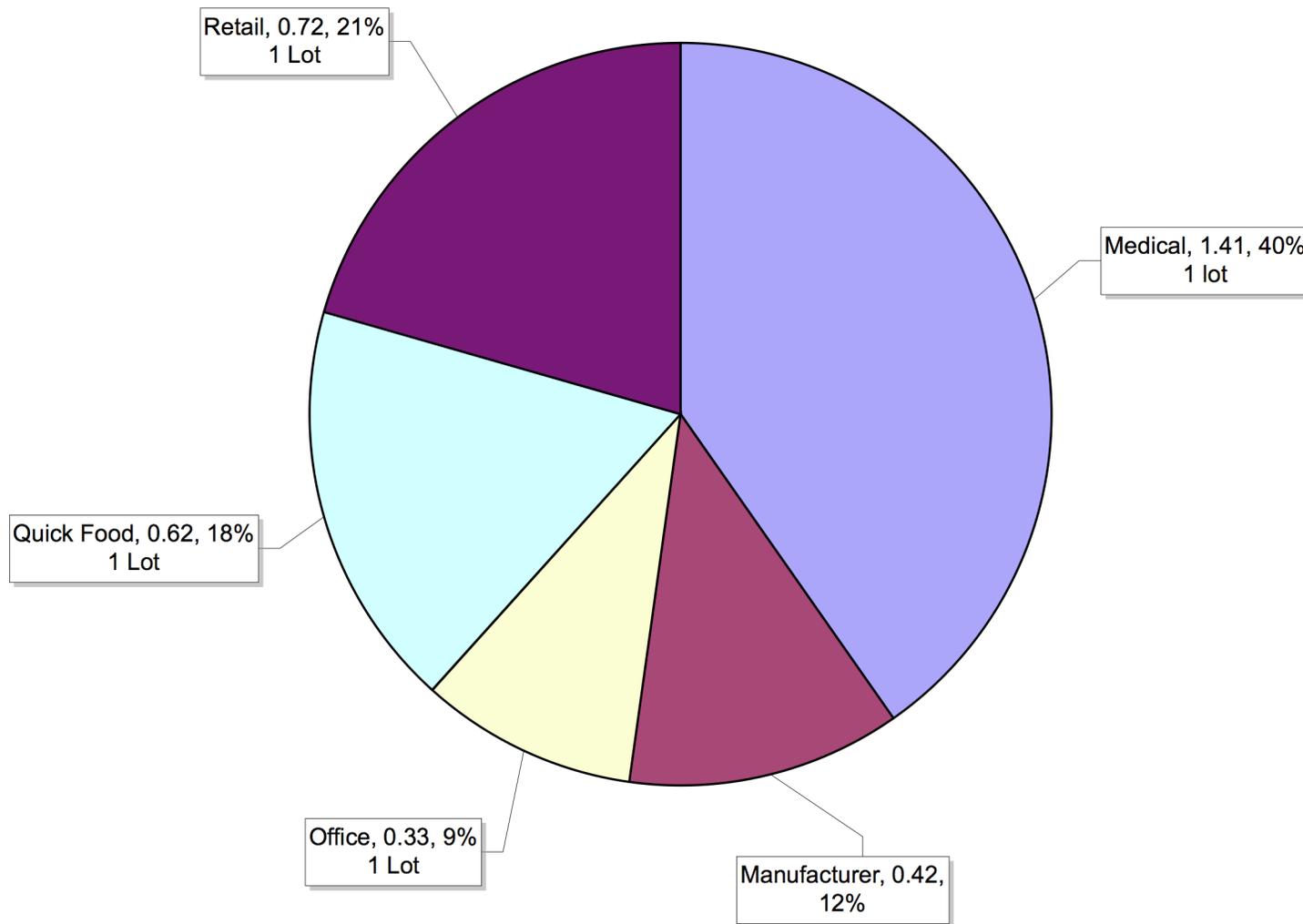
**Figure 6: Middle Village Land Uses 36.13 Acres**  
(Calculations are approximate)



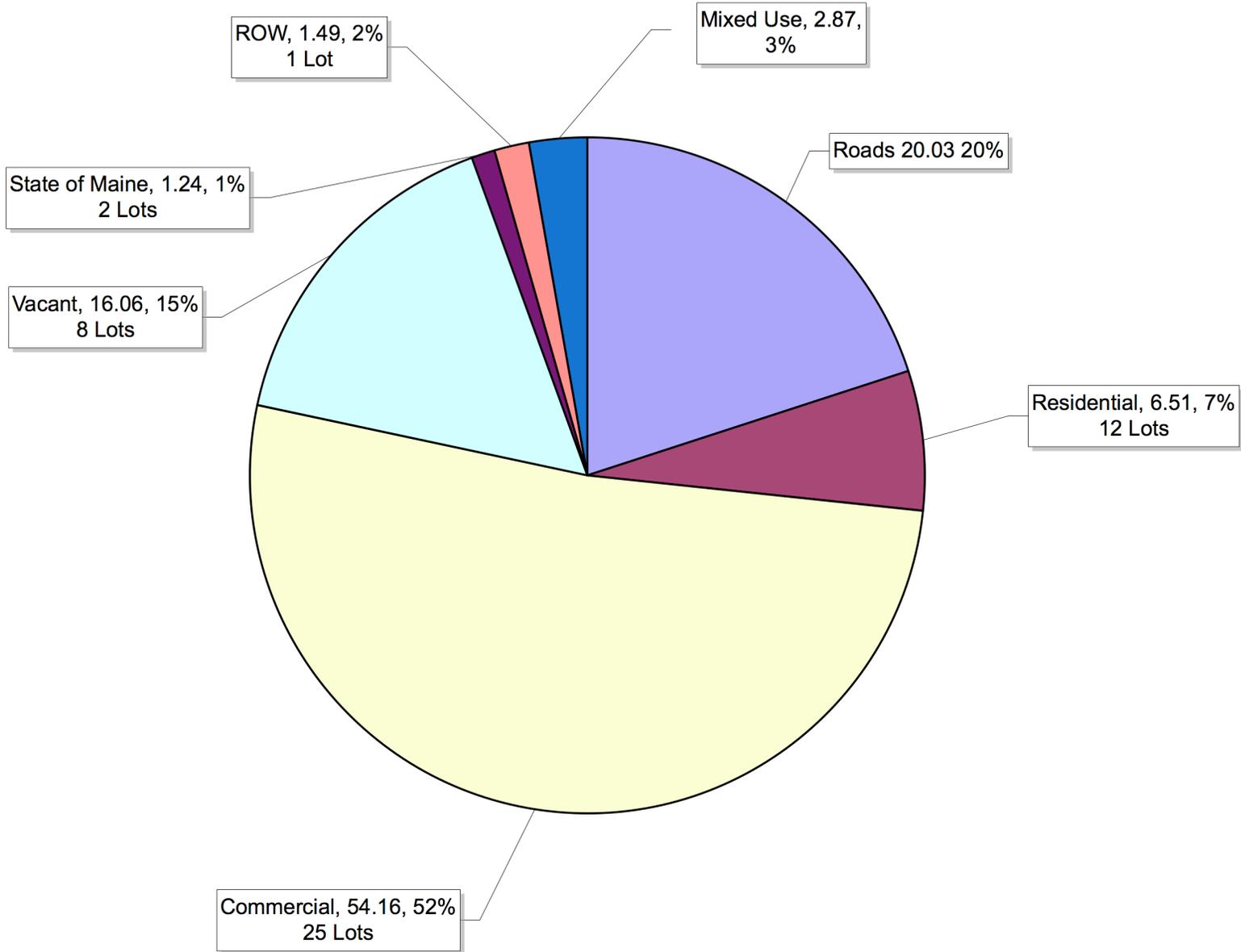
**Figure 7: Middle Village Residential Land Uses 17.76 Acres**  
(Calculations are approximate)



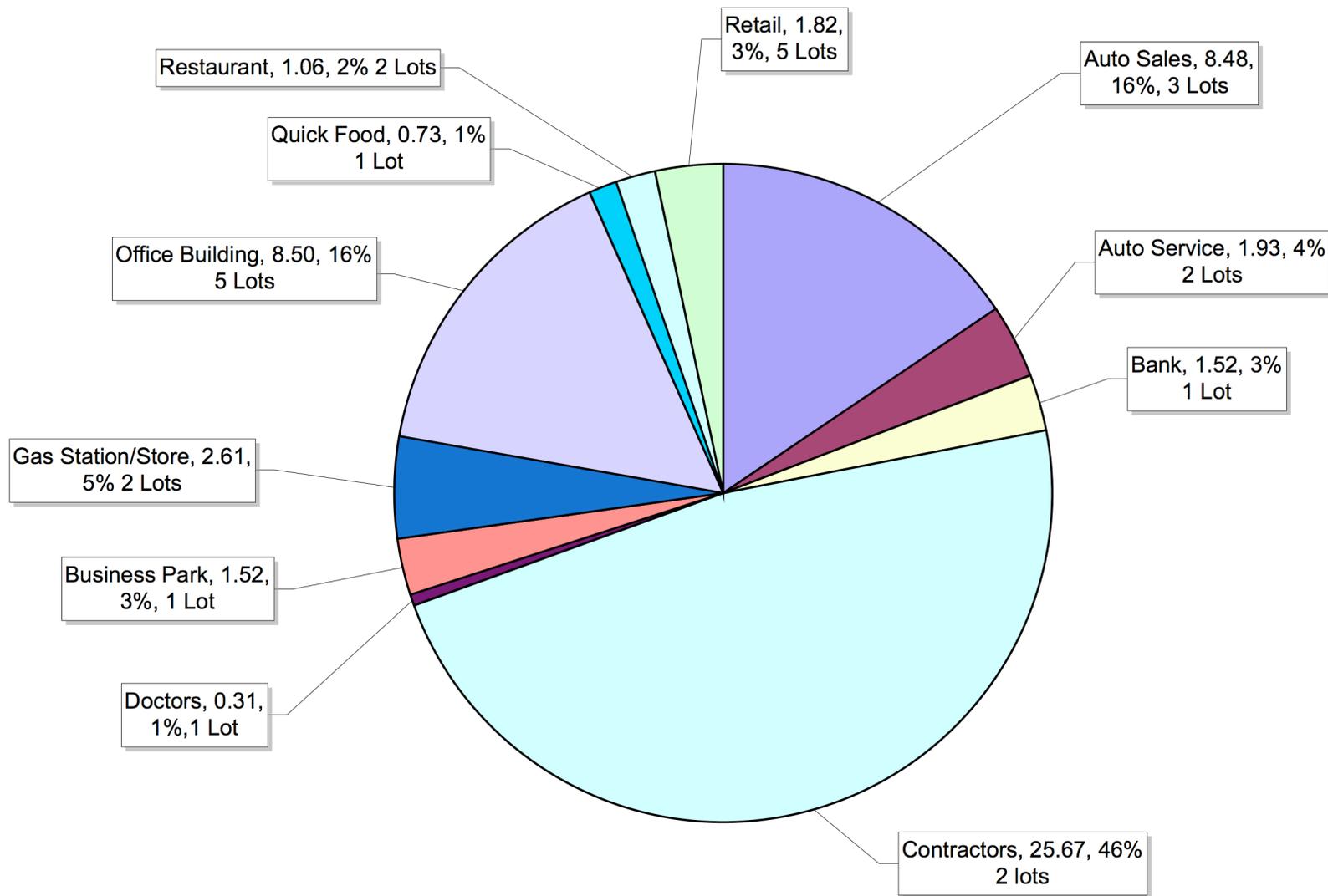
**Figure 8: Middle Village Commercial Land Uses 3.50 Acres**  
(Calculations are approximate)



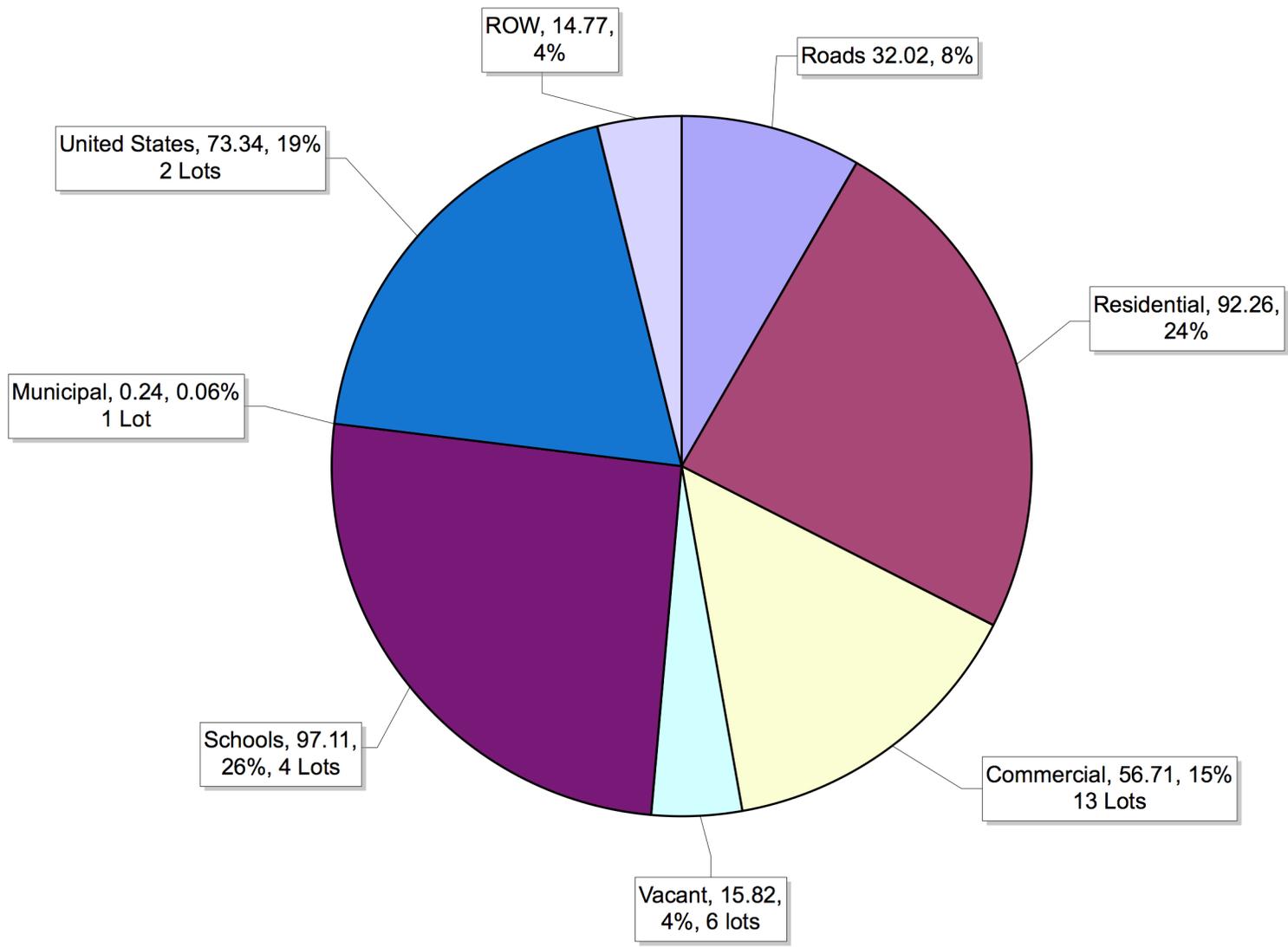
**Figure 9: Commercial Corridor Land Uses 99.48 Acres**  
(Calculations are approximate)



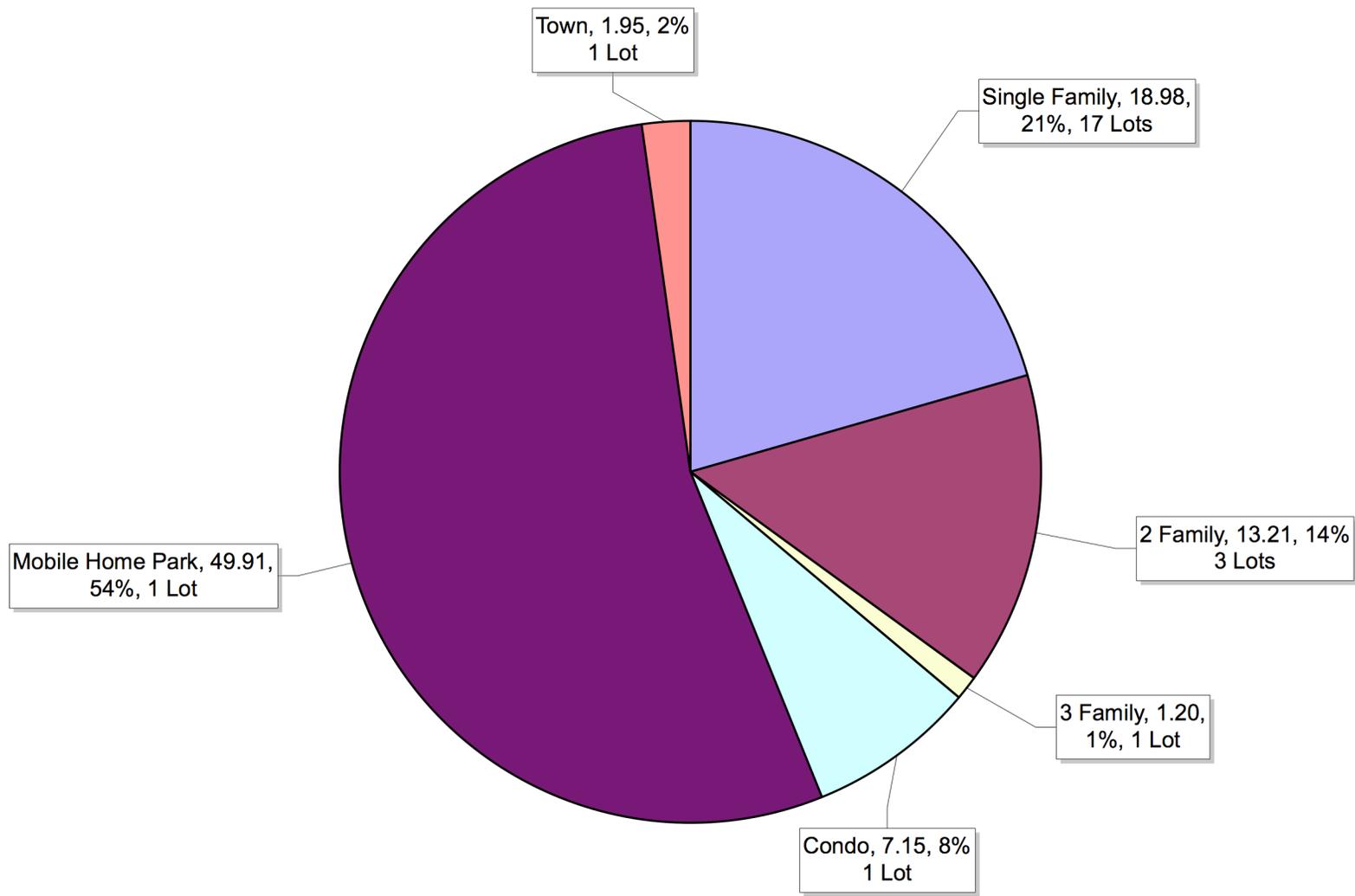
**Figure 10: Commercial Corridor Commercial Land Uses**  
**54.61 Acres**  
 (Calculations are approximate)



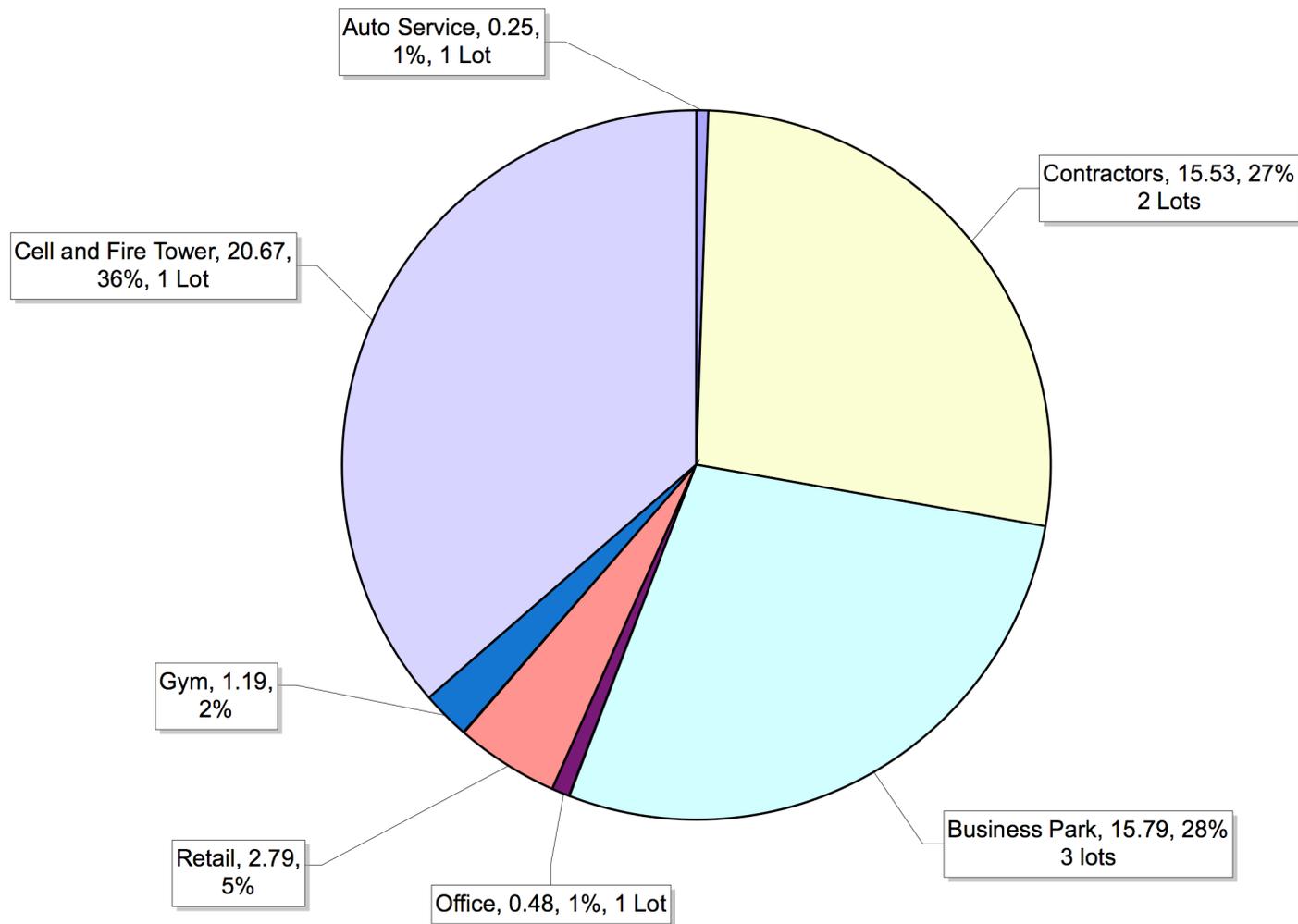
**Figure 11: Upper Village Land Uses 382.27 Acres**  
(Calculations are approximate)



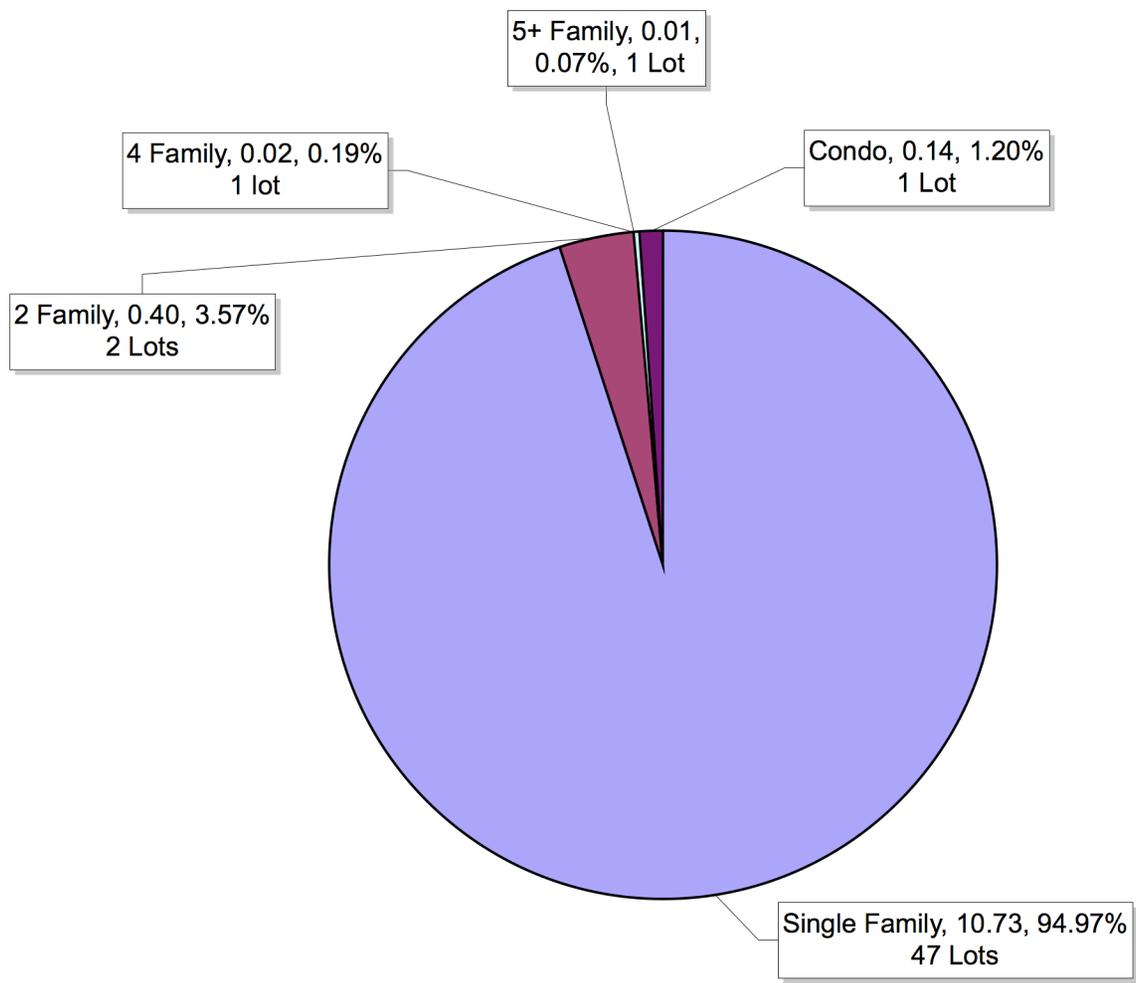
**Figure 12: Upper Village Residential Land Uses 92.26 Acres**  
(Calculations are approximate)



**Figure 13: Upper Village Commercial Land Uses 56.71 Acres**  
(Calculations are approximate)



**Figure 14: R1 Residential Land Uses 11.29 Acres**  
(Total R1 Zone with Roads 14.67 Acres)



**Topsham Main Street Village Plan**

**Table 3: Land Use, Area (acres) and Lots by Zone**

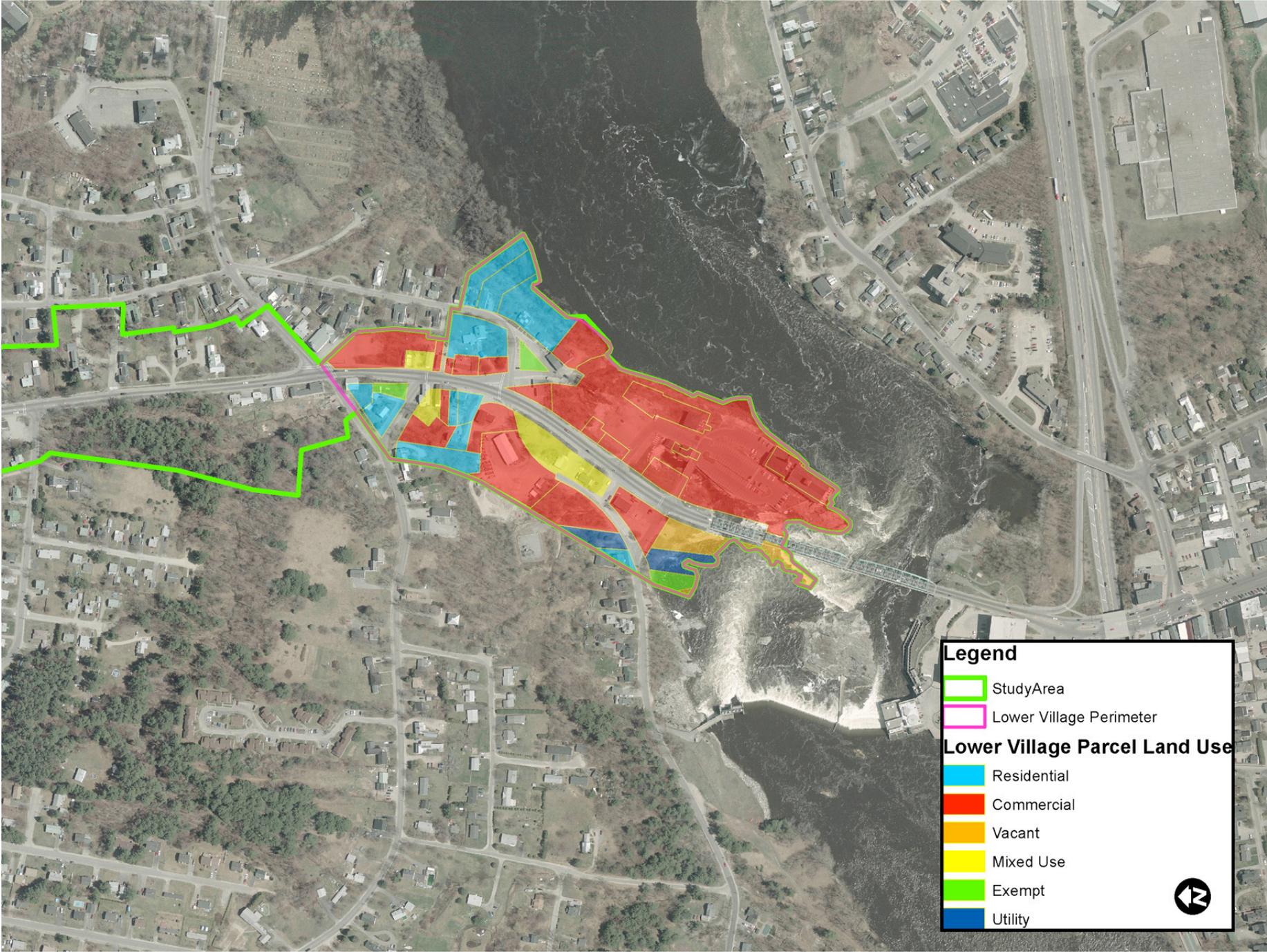
*(numbers are approximate)*

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Residential</b>	<b>Roads</b>	<b>ROW</b>	<b>Churches</b>	<b>United States</b>	<b>State of Maine</b>	<b>Municipal</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>Vacant</b>	<b>Commercial</b>	<b>Mixed-Use</b>
<b>LV</b>	3.88	5.35	0.26				0.39		1.44	11.64	0.75
<b>MV</b>	16.08	5.03		4.30					2.09	3.17	4.17
<b>CC</b>	6.51	20.03	1.49			1.24			16.06	54.16*	2.87
<b>UV</b>	92.26	32.02	14.77		73.34		0.06	97.11	15.82	56.71	
<b>R1</b>	11.29	3.38									

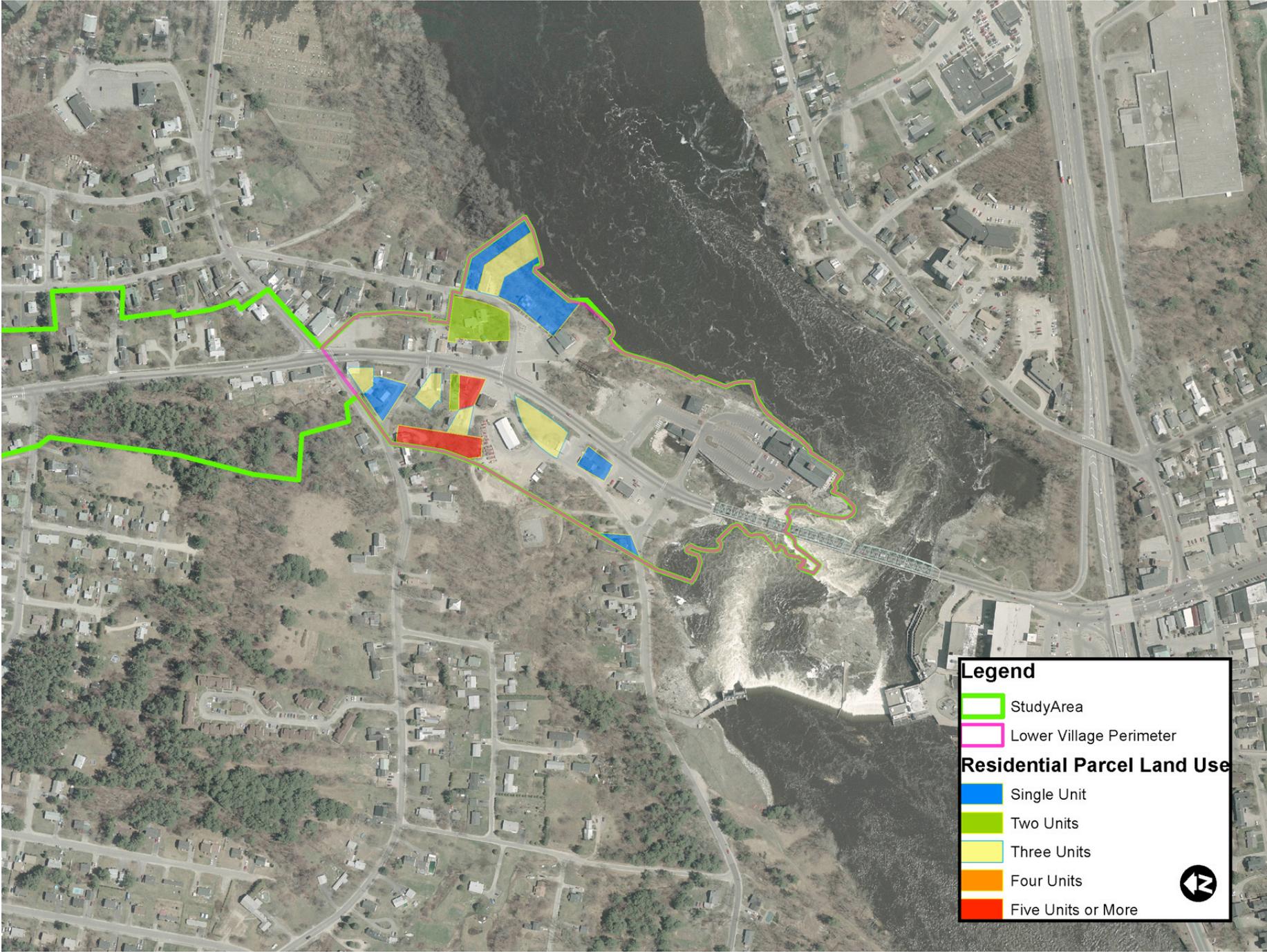
- LV: Lower Village**
- MV: Middle Village**
- CC: Commercial Corridor**
- UV: Upper Village**
- R1: Residential 1**

\*This number will decrease if the proposed Town Hall complex land is redeveloped.

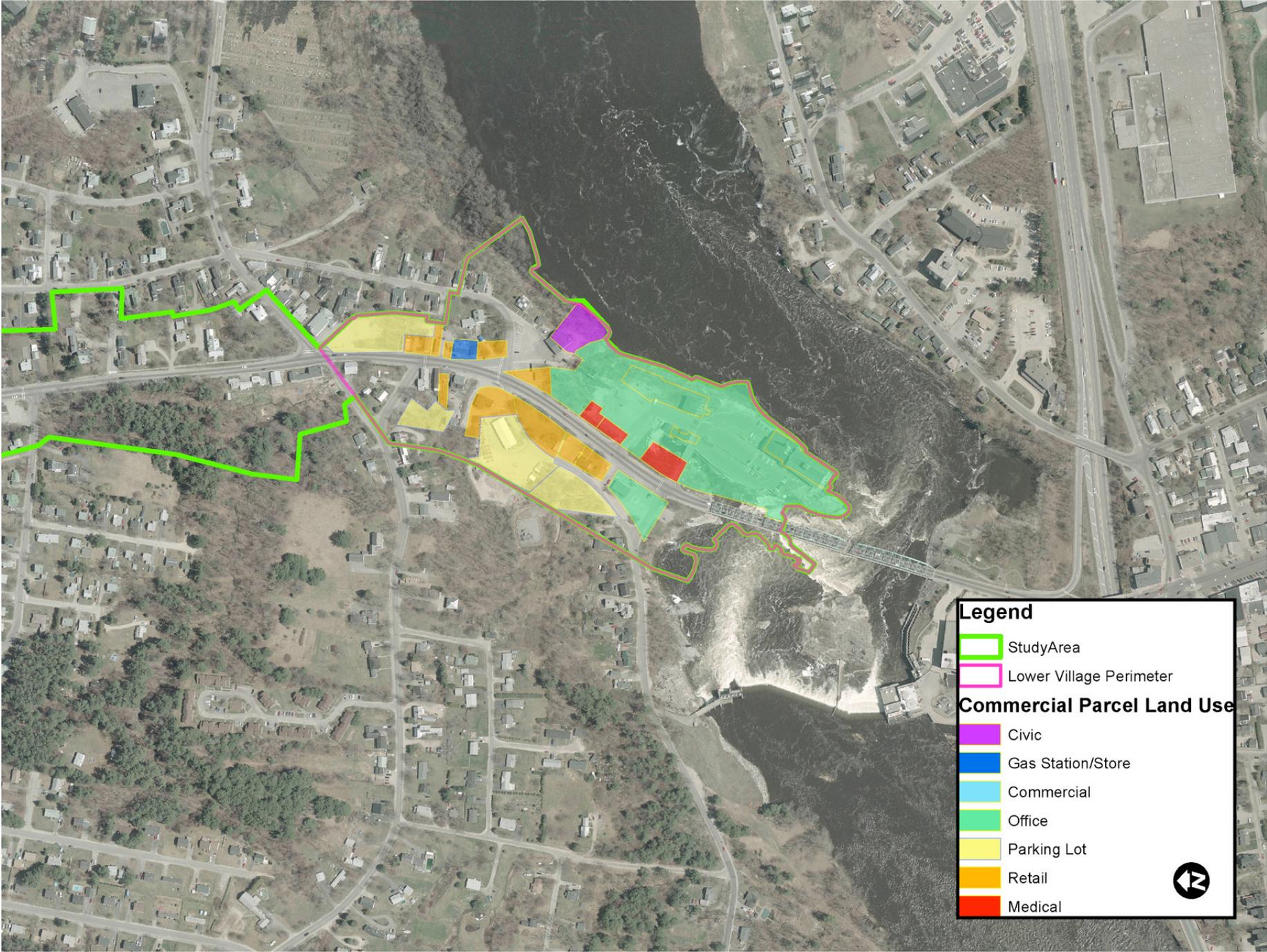
Map 5: Topsham Main Street Village Area Lower Village Land Uses



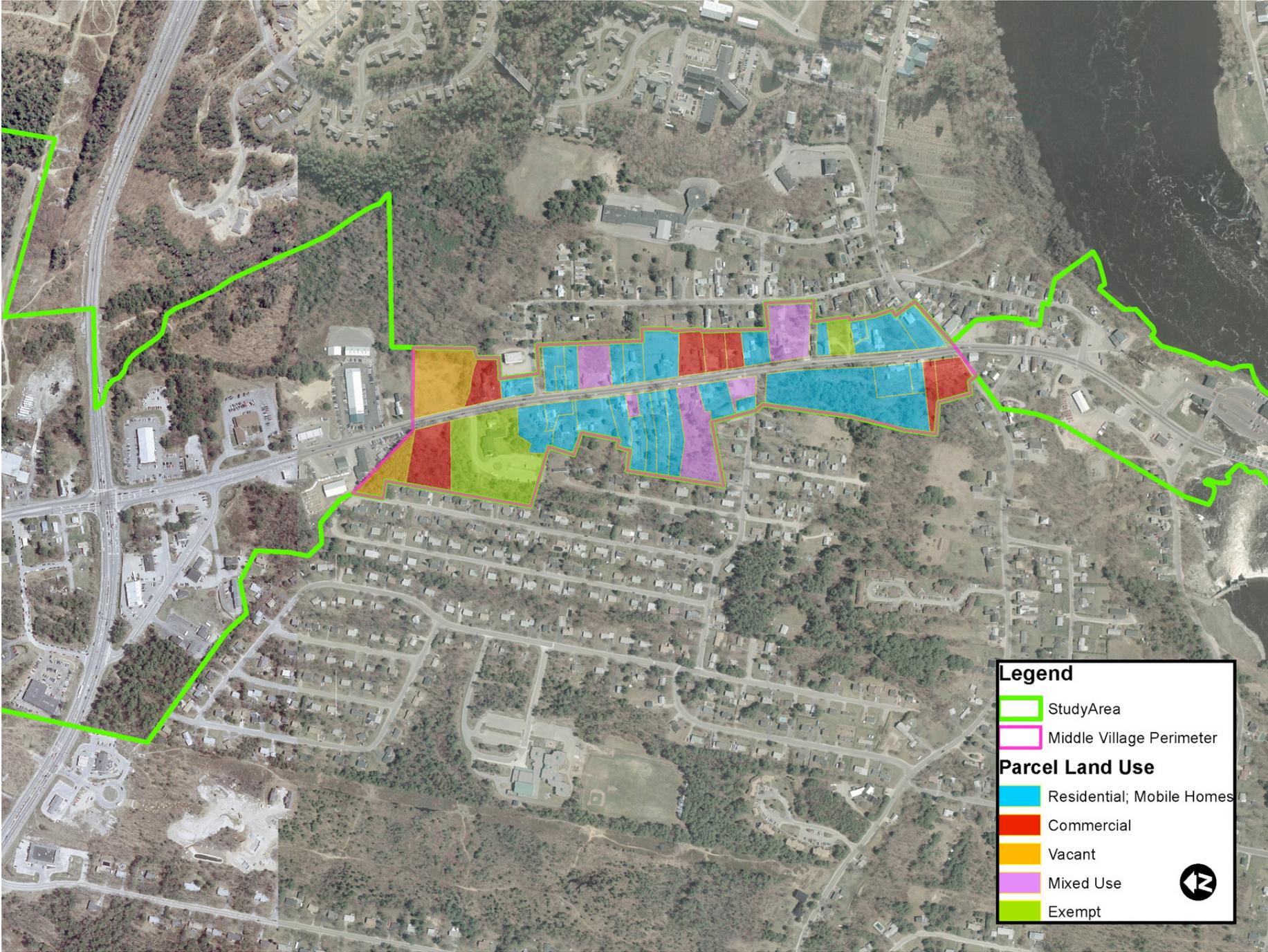
Map 6: Topsham Main Street Village Area Lower Village Residential Land Uses



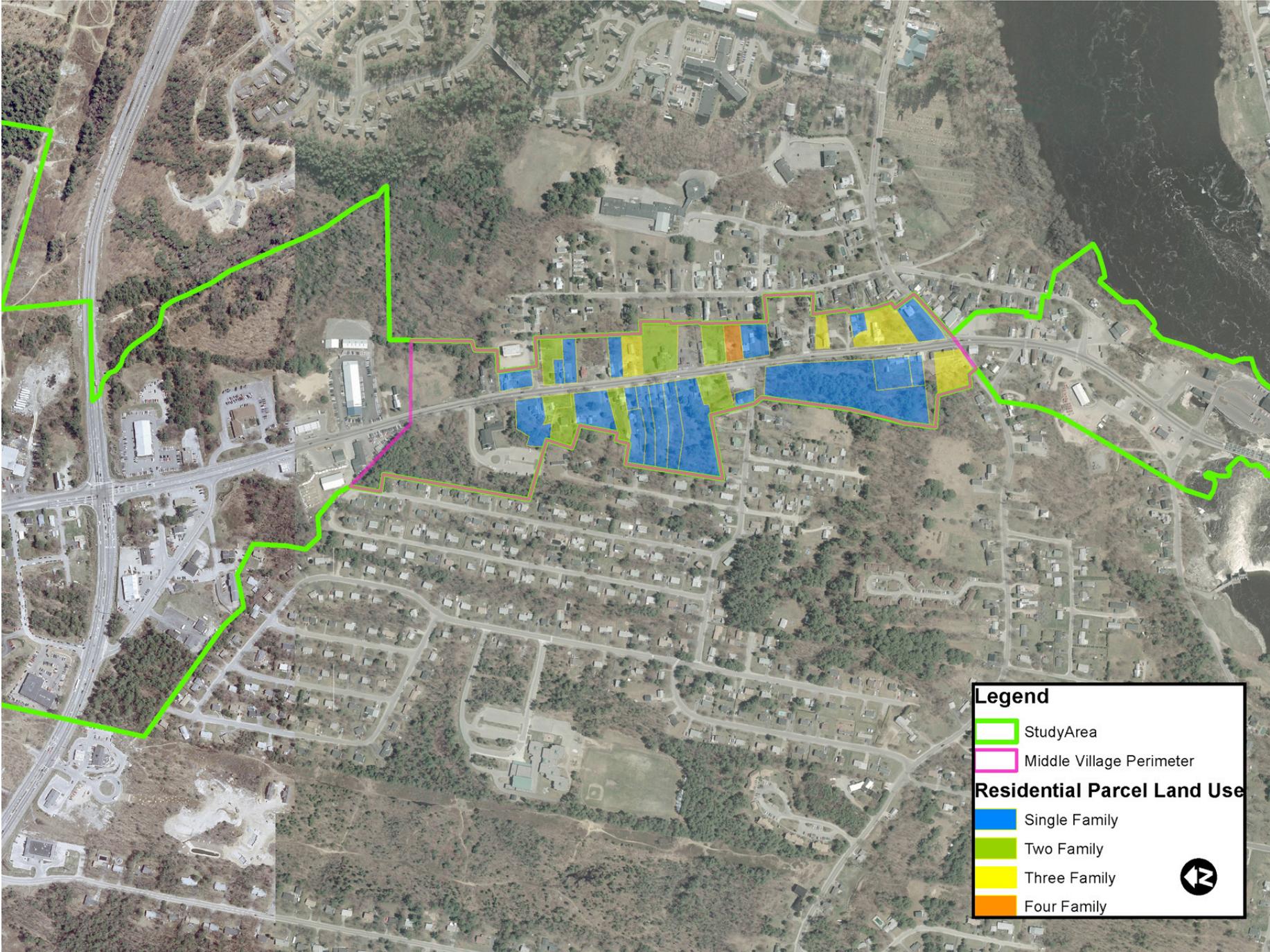
Map 7: Topsham Main Street Village Area Lower Village Commercial Land Uses



Map 8: Topsham Main Street Village Area Middle Village Land Uses



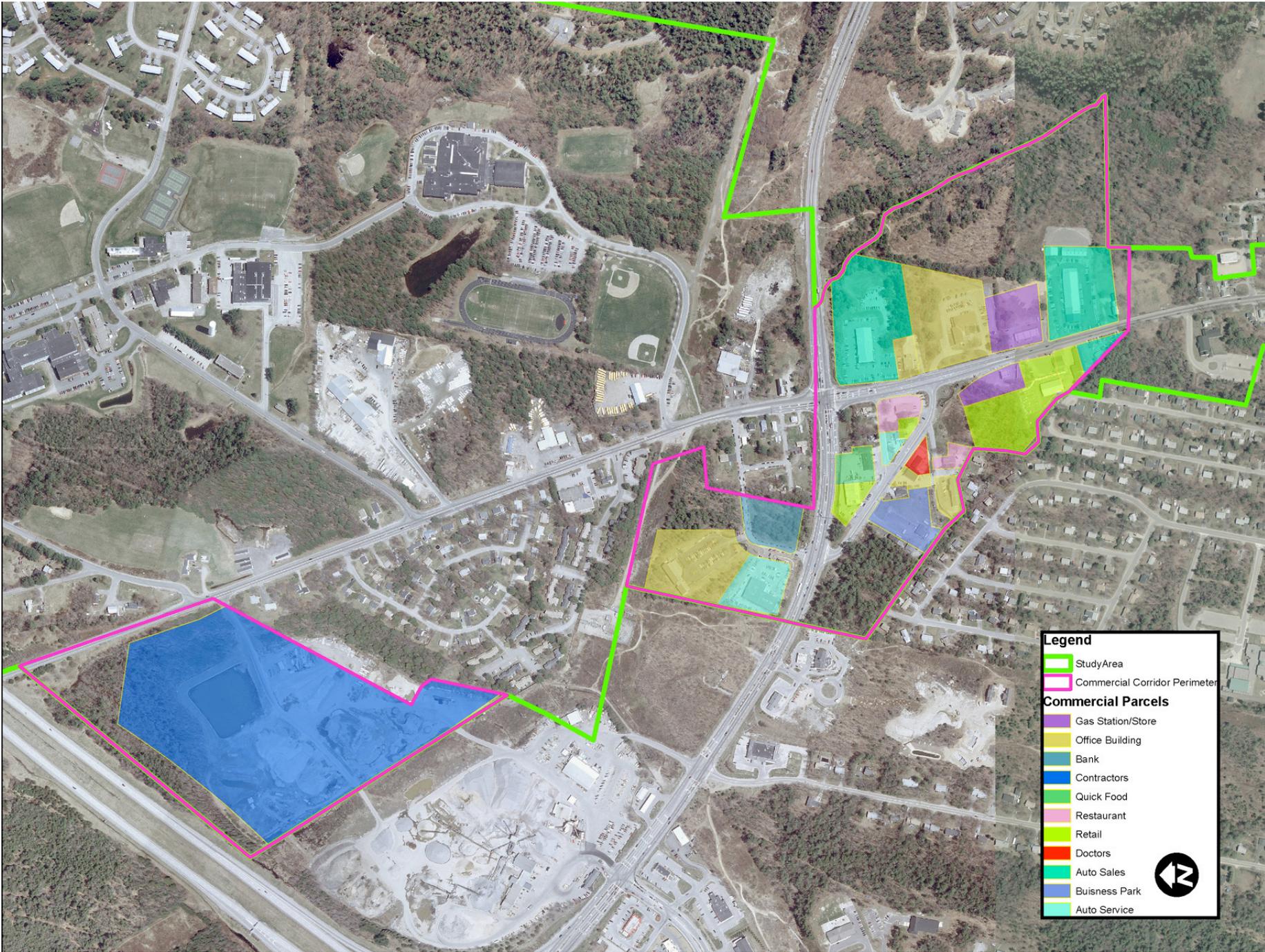
Map 9: Topsham Main Street Village Area Middle Village Residential Land Uses



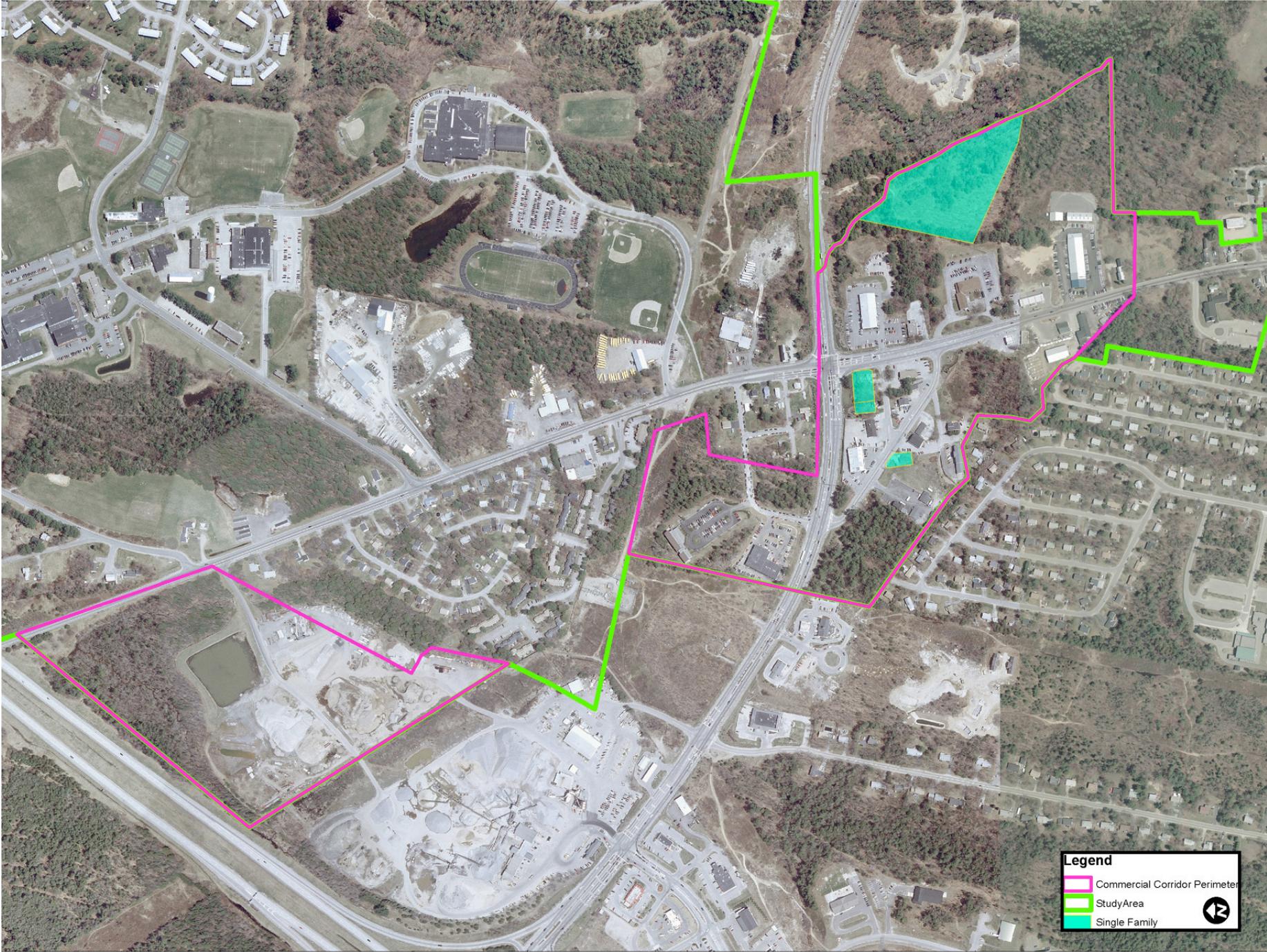
Map 10: Topsham Main Street Village Area Middle Village Commercial Land Uses



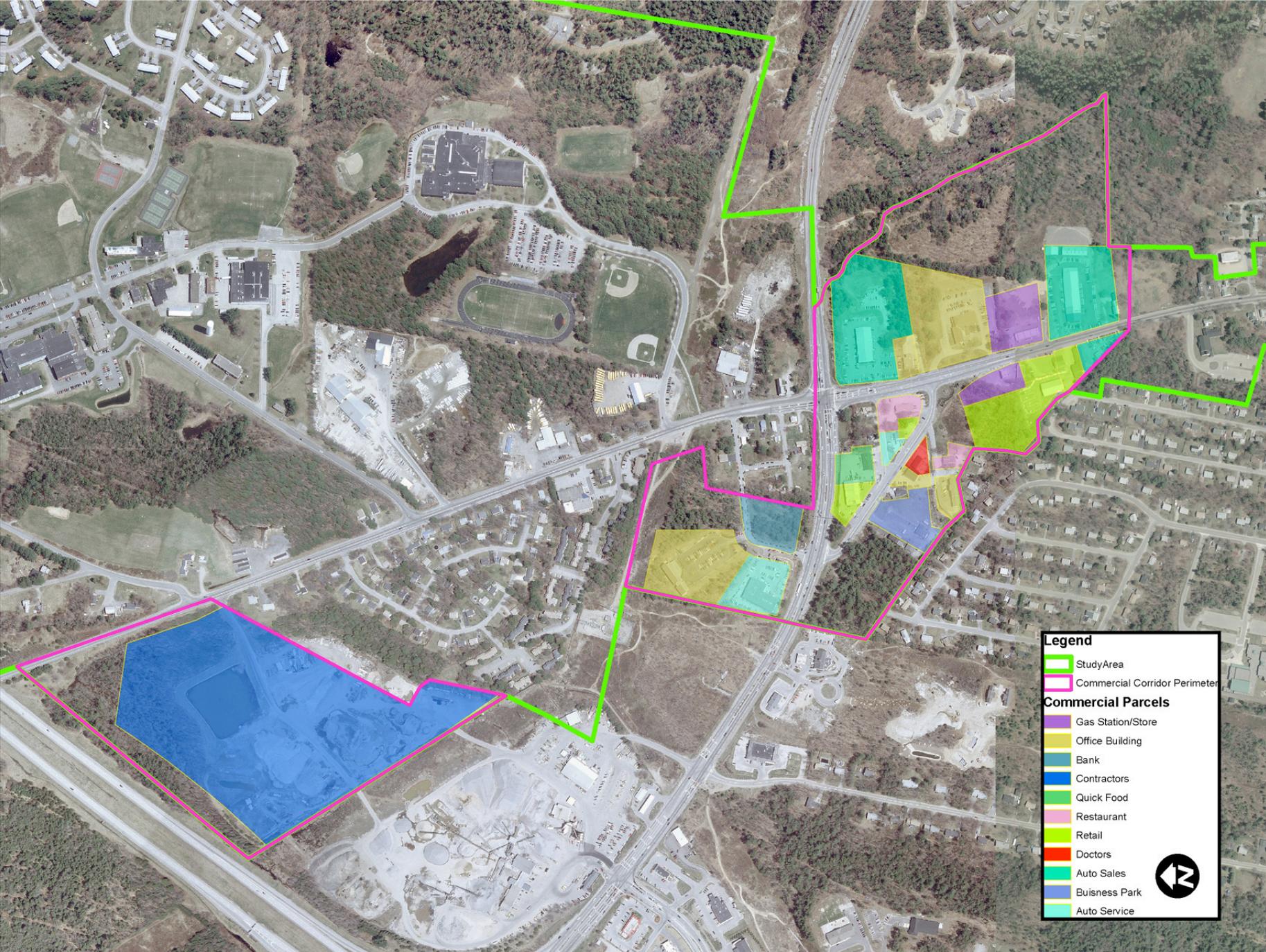
Map 11: Topsham Main Street Village Area Commercial Corridor Land Uses



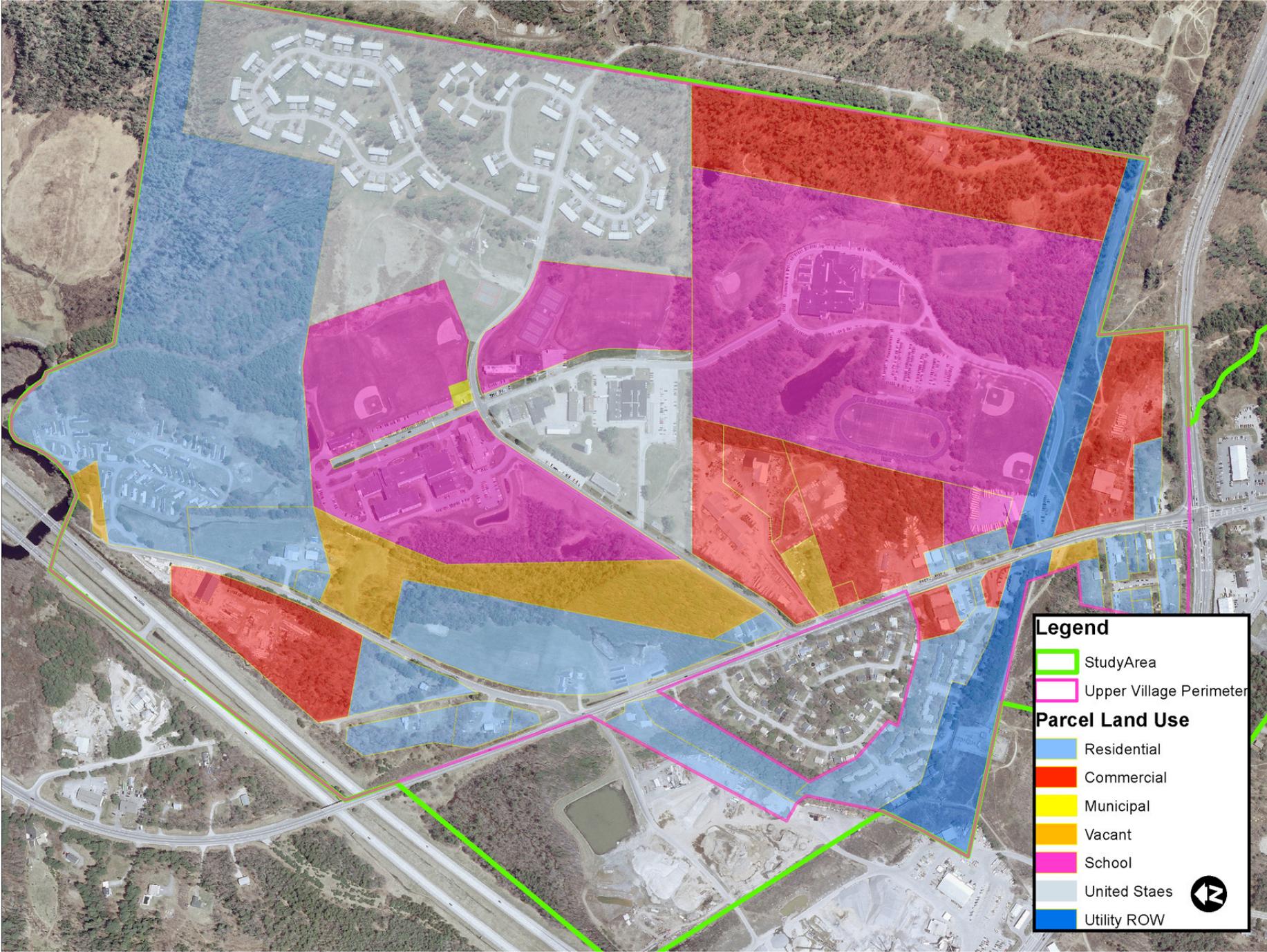
Map 12: Topsham Main Street Village Area Commercial Corridor Residential Land Uses



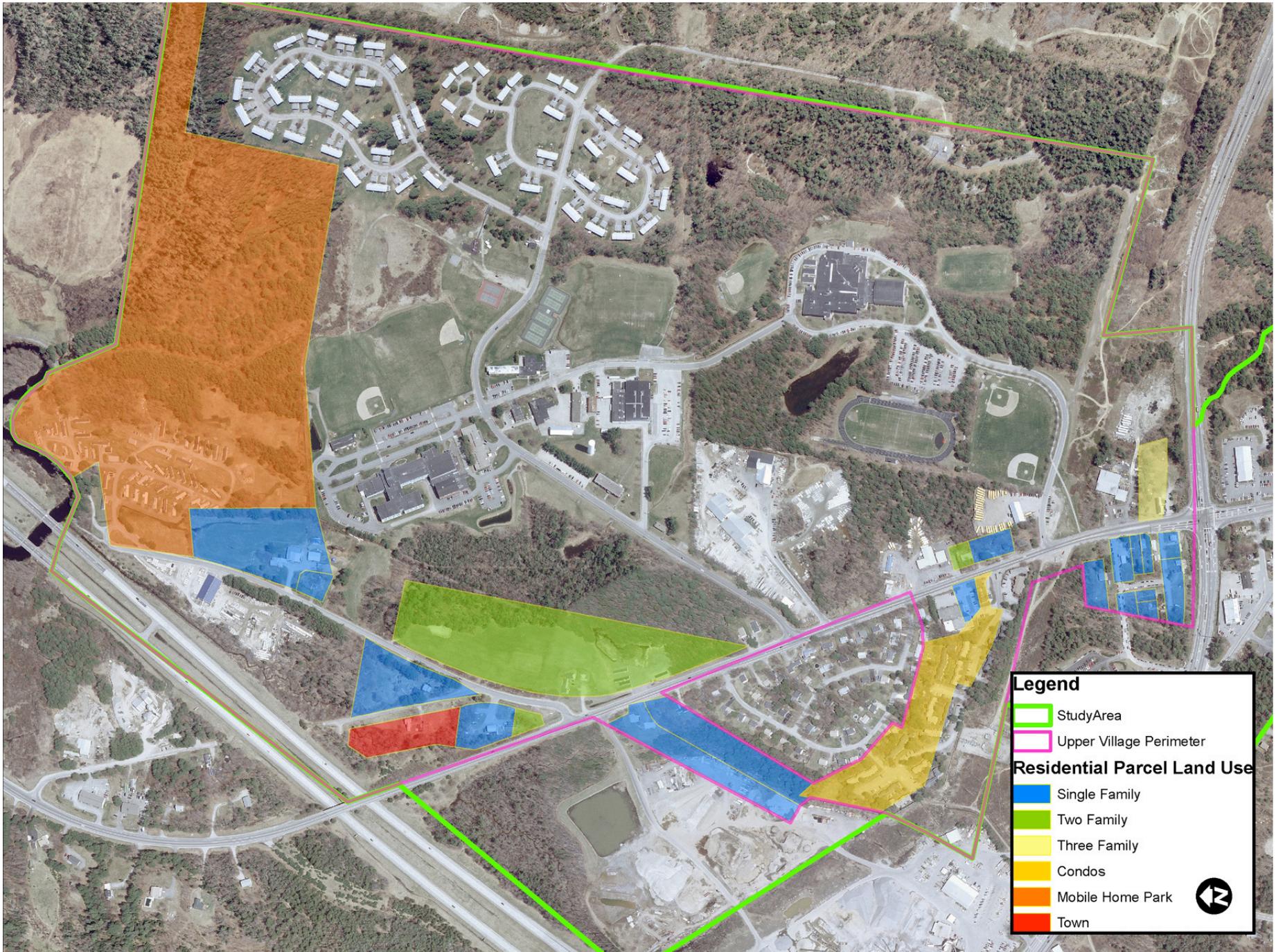
Map 13: Topsham Main Street Village Area Commercial Corridor Commercial Land Uses



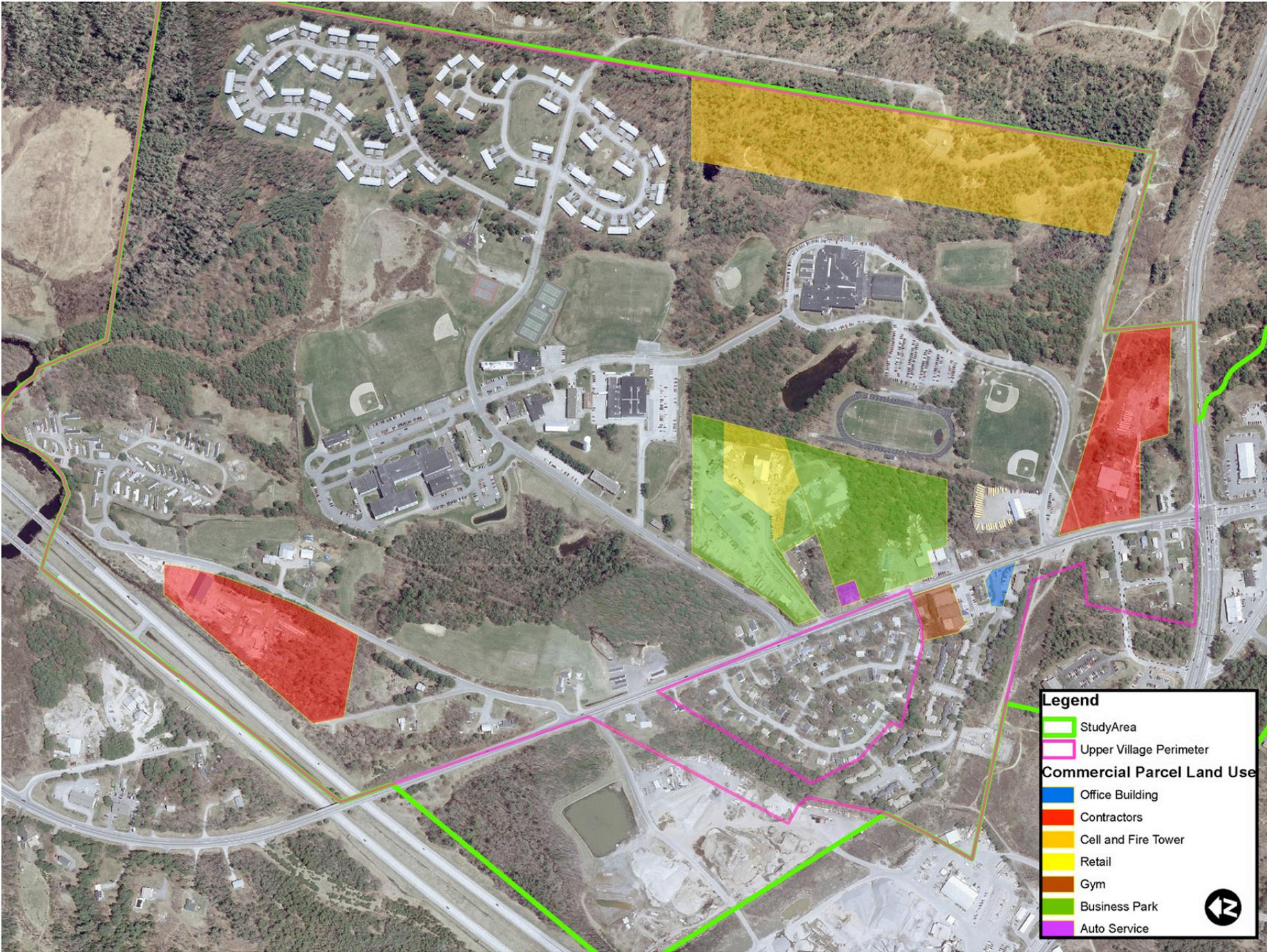
Map 14: Topsham Main Street Village Area Upper Village Land Uses



Map 15: Topsham Main Street Village Area Upper Village Residential Land Uses



Map 16: Topsham Main Street Village Area Upper Village Commercial Land Uses



## **The Look of Land Use**

The Figures and Table are tools to assist in understanding the land uses by zone with further analysis of the commercial and residential uses. The Maps showing the actual location of commercial, residential and other uses match a use with a place, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the relationship between use, scale and neighborhood character.



*A new professional use in the Middle Village matching the scale, placement and look of adjacent buildings. How many similar projects should be allowed into the Middle Village Zone? The Zoning Ordinance is ambiguous whether professional offices in the Middle Village Zone can be established in new buildings or whether the use is required to be incorporated in an existing building.*

What is evident from the information is that there is a diverse range of uses within the Main Street Village area. The different land use types are reasonably segregated by zone. This is not unusual; modern zoning typically reflects existing land use types. As the Main Street Village Plan is developed and implemented, a choice needs to be made whether the current pattern of uses should be reinforced or are measures needed to create a wider

diversity of uses within each zone? Or is there some combination of reinforcement and expansion of uses depending on the area?

Almost everyone participating in the public forums declared the Lower Village revitalization a success and would like to “see” that in other parts of Main Street. As a model for a mix of land uses, the Lower Village is actually limited in variety with a strong emphasis on commercial / professional uses. Only three apartments have been created during the revitalization. In fact, several homes in the Lower Village were torn down or converted for commercial uses.



*This is the only new building in the Lower Village redevelopment that is mixed-use. There are commercial spaces on the first floor and apartments on the second floor.*

Only a small percentage of the land in the Lower Village is mixed-use (defined as a building or parcel containing residential and non-residential uses), which is generally understood as the ideal form of village redevelopment, creating housing and commercial uses for a full 24-hour use cycle. In summary, participants in the public forums may like what they “see” in the Lower Village, but if one looks deeper than the quality of the architecture and

streetscapes, is it the ideal model for redevelopment opportunities in the Commercial Corridor and Upper Village Zones?



*The placement of the buildings and the architecture add to the visual appeal of the Lower Village, however these buildings are not mixed-use. Should new buildings be required to have residential uses on the second floor? Does this make sense for developers?*

The physical redevelopment of the Lower Village, with the selective demolition of buildings and the careful placement of parking behind well-designed buildings is successful model, however the actual diversity of land uses should be examined. Ideally the “form” of a village redevelopment or preservation and the mix of “uses” coincide in a unified whole. One participant in the public workshops suggested that the Lower Village redevelopment is a business park in the form of a historic village. Most people will not argue with the overall value of the Lower Village redevelopment, but there is a valuable lesson to be learned from the lack of mixed-use development in the efforts.



*These existing buildings in the Lower Village include commercial and residential uses and define the edge of Main Street as an “outdoor” room.*

### **Parking and Land Use**

Transportation conditions are discussed in detail in Section III, but it is important to analyze parking within the context of land use. The required parking for a specified land use is often the limiting factor for the scale of the use, particularly in historic areas. For example, the ongoing Bowdoin Mill redevelopment, which most everyone agrees is an exemplary project, could not happen if it were not for the parking lot created at the former Municipal Department of Public Works site behind the new buildings along the closed portion of Summer Street. This parking lot is remote and pedestrians must cross Main Street at the Summer Street intersection. The revitalization of the Lower Village cannot occur without this parking lot.

In the Middle Village, which has a more established pattern of development than the Lower Village, the required parking for land uses along with other dimensional requirements such as required open space, maximum building height, floor area ratio and the specified location of parking, all work together in a complex

formula to keep a land use and the required parking in scale with the predominately residential neighborhood. In 2000, the Zoning Ordinance was amended to better guide parking in the three Village zones. Both positive and negative examples of the intent of performance standards and zoning regulations are now available to gauge whether the “formula” for parking enforced through Site Plan Review, dimensional requirements and other zoning regulations need to be revisited on a zone-by-zone basis creating more flexible or more restrictive parking standards.

Aerial photographs and field surveys detailed areas of parking in the various zones as noted below in Maps 17 and 18.



*The parking is placed between the building and Main Street. This is a lose lose situation. The building lacks presence, Main Street becomes a conduit for cars and the parking is unattractive.*

Recent development in the Lower Village places the parking behind the buildings, with some on-street parking, and the building close to the street, creating a pedestrian scaled street. Streets can be designed to not allow the car to dominate the overall character.

A total acreage count of parking in the study area is approximately 31.5 acres. This does not include small scale parking areas such as parking serving homes converted to apartments or standard residential driveways. The numbers are noted below, but the visceral impact comes from looking at Maps 17 and 18.

**Table 2: Land Area of Parking by Zone**

<b>Zone</b>	<b># of Parking Lots</b>	<b>Acres</b>
LV	8	4
MV	5	1
CC	23	11
UV	26	15
R1	0	0

All parking within the study area is offsite, except a limited amount of onstreet spaces in the Lower Village. Onstreet parking is appropriate for certain areas and is a common aspect in many Maine villages. Onstreet parking can provide more opportunities for developing small lots or redeveloping existing lots and is an effective traffic calming measure.

Map 17: Topsham Main Street Village - Auto Domain and Parking Coverage South of 196



Map 18: Topsham Main Street Village - Auto Domain and Parking Coverage North of 196





*Land uses, such as the Middle School in the Upper Village, require larger parcels to support the required parking. One advantage to mixed-use developments is that the parking can be used by one use during the day and another at night, maximizing the use of the parking.*

### **Land Use Summary**

- Historic Villages often include land uses, which are not apparent by the architecture and the site. Use of properties evolves over time, creating new dynamics and pressures on neighborhoods that are beneficial and detrimental.
- The character of Main Street varies the two-mile length, with distinct divisions between the Commercial Corridor and the Middle Village and the more “rural” lands north of 196.
- Traffic is the most negative “land use” in the Main Street Village area, but the prevalence and even distribution of roads provides a potential framework for creating safe pedestrian connectivity and visual cohesion.
- There are land uses in the Commercial Corridor and the Upper Village that may be visually incompatible or out of scale with the concept of a Main Street. These properties must be dealt with carefully to understand the short-term

and long-term role they play in the Main Street Village area.

- The Main Street Village area includes most of the key civic uses in Topsham. With the addition of the proposed Town Hall complex and the riverfront park, Main Street and the adjacent neighborhoods will be the center of many civic activities for the town, with the exception of the library.
- Commercial and residential uses are evenly distributed in the five zones comprising the Main Street Village area, but otherwise most uses are segregated by zone. Is a more even distribution of uses needed, such as mixed-use? Are there certain uses absent from Main Street that would create a stronger village?
- The Lower Village is near complete build out.
- The Middle Village is stable, but absorbing change into the existing fabric. Attention has to be paid to encroachment of adjacent zones and the intensity of allowable uses within the Middle Village. Specific standards need to be enforced or developed to allow for flexibility, while protecting the existing residential character.
- The Commercial Corridor includes large established business on the east side and the potential for redevelopment of properties along the west side. This area may want to be rezoned from Commercial Corridor to “Village Center” allowing economic development, but carefully controlling the quality of architecture, landscape and a prescribed mix of uses, such as housing on the second floor of new buildings.
- The Upper Village has the greatest opportunity for change, increasing housing units and other uses while adding to local traffic impacts.
- The Upper Village includes large campus uses such as the BNAS Annex, the Mount Ararat Middle and High Schools. The parcels along Main Street include established businesses of varying visual quality. Many of these lots have the potential for redevelopment. The Upper Village contains large parcels that may have a higher and best use in the future. Planning for the Upper

Village should anticipate larger scale developments, because of the existing large-scale land uses and large lots with the potential for redevelopment. The area should be studied as a whole, almost like a campus, just as the Lower Village has been redeveloped in a unified manner with a legible sense of place and scale. Any planning efforts need to be closely coordinated with the key stakeholders.

- A sewer line extends to the mobile home park north of the Mount Ararat Middle School. This large parcel should be included in the master planning for the redevelopment of the BNAS Annex.
- Adaptive reuse and minor redevelopment are the future trends in the Lower and Middle Villages. The Commercial Corridor and the Upper Village Zone have the capacity for greater change. Planning efforts should take into account the scale of change in relation to existing conditions.
- Planning should address roads and vehicles as a “land use.” This is the dominant aspect to the area and impacts will only increase as the Main Street Village area grows and Main Street absorbs more regional traffic.
- There are several potential open space land use areas such as the Middle Village “orchard” and adjacent lands, the proposed riverfront park in the Lower Village and the campus settings and the adjacent woodlands (Mount Ararat) that can be critical civic landscapes for the town and the immediate neighborhoods.
- The Commercial Corridor Zone along Main Street has established large-scale uses on the east side. The west side of Main Street is evolving with the potential to become a mixed-use / civic village center. The area comprising the Monument Place neighborhood, the proposed Town Hall, the post office and the town wide trail system crossing is the foundation for a village center.
- The quality of architecture and landscape and the overall pedestrian scale of development can have a stronger impact on people than the actual use of a property. The Lower Village and the Commercial Corridor have an equal percentage of commercial development, but to most people these areas are practically antithetical. The

psychological impact of good design, regardless of land use, cannot be overstated

## 2. Streetscape

The character of the approximately two miles of streetscape varies between the Lower, Middle, Commercial Corridor and Upper Village Zones.

Maps 19 and 20 detail the existing streetscape conditions south of Route 196 and north of Route 196 respectively. The mapped streetscape components include:

- Traffic Lights
- Streetlights
- Utility Poles
- Antique Sidewalk Lights
- Sidewalks
- Crosswalks
- Proposed Trails
- Bike Lanes

### Traffic Lights

Traffic lights are reviewed in this portion of the analysis because they are located at critical Main Street pedestrian crossings. There are three traffic lights along the entire length of Main Street. A flashing, non-pedestrian signal light is located at Canam Drive. The other two lights are located at the 196 and Elm Street intersections.

The north / south pedestrian activated signal on the eastern side of the 196 intersection provides only enough time to cross two lanes of traffic to the center median. To activate the light at the northeaster corner of this intersection, a pedestrian must cross the 196 northbound turning lane before reaching a triangle shaped median. This creates a dangerous situation for the pedestrian and does not provide warning for western bound drivers turning north on to Main Street.

Pedestrians approaching the intersection from the south do not have to cross a turning lane to activate the crosswalk light. However, once the pedestrian reaches the triangle shaped median to the north of the four lanes, the unsafe north turning lane crossing is, again, a safety issue.

The east / west pedestrian signal on the southern leg of the 196 intersection is placed safely outside travel lanes. However, on the western side pedestrians are forced to pause at a triangle defining the 196 southbound turning lane before crossing the remaining unsignaled crosswalk to the western side of Main Street. This is an unsafe situation identical to crosswalk arrangement kitty corner at the 196 northbound turning lane.

This crosswalk connects to a sidewalk on the southern side of 196, but there is no sidewalk on the western side of Main Street.

The traffic light at the Elm Street intersection has a pedestrian signal for crosswalk on the eastern side. An unsignalized crosswalk is located on the southern leg leading to the Winter Street sidewalk.

The Summer Street intersection has been identified as a high crash location in the most recent MEDOT counts. A crosswalk is located on the northern leg of this intersection, but crossing is dangerous. Pedestrian activity in this area will only increase with the completion of proposed buildings and the Androscoggin park. A light at this intersection with a pedestrian signal is necessary, particularly because the sidewalk on the Frank Wood Bridge is on the western side of Main Street providing pedestrian access to Brunswick.

### **Streetlights**

Antique style streetlights are located on both sides of Main Street in the Lower Village beginning north of the Green Street intersection. North of this intersection utilities, are located above ground and streetlights are part of the utility pole system. The lights / utility poles are located on the eastern side of Main Street crossing to the western side of Main Street at Forest Drive where there is crosswalk, but no sidewalk.

The scale and style of the freestanding streetlights in the Lower Village reinforces the more historic and pedestrian nature of this area. The style, scale and proximity of buildings with mounted light fixtures in the Lower Village also add to pedestrian safety and a positive sense of place.

### **Utility Poles**

As noted above, utility poles are located on the eastern side of Main Street beginning at the Green Street Intersection. Utility poles and lines cross to the western side of Main Street at the Forest Drive intersection. In front of the Volvo dealership, there is a short feed to utility poles serving several commercial uses on the western side of Main Street.

Main Street south of the Volvo dealership was rebuilt in 2000. It is unlikely that utilities in this area will be placed underground. If land use within the Commercial Corridor Zone (beginning with the development of the Town Hall Complex and the Monument Place realignments) there is the opportunity to begin placing utilities underground, improving visual quality.

### **Antique Sidewalk Lights**

As noted above, antique style sidewalk lights are located on both sides of Main Street south of the Green Street intersection. These lights are freestanding and are not part of a system of overhead utilities.

### **Sidewalks**

A sidewalk is located on the western side of Main Street from the Frank Wood Bridge to the Elm Street intersection. A sidewalk is located on the eastern side of Main Street beginning at the southern entrance to the Bowdoin Mill Complex north to Canam Drive. There is a crosswalk on to the northern side of Canam Drive and a sidewalk running from Main Street to the Middle School on the northern side of Canam Drive. A system of sidewalks on the northern and southern sides of Eagles Way serves Mount Ararat High school.



*The streetscape in the Upper Village is either non-existent or visually unappealing.*

There are additional sidewalk offshoots in the Lower and Middle Village Zones from Main Street. These are often sidewalk fragments running a short distance into the adjacent neighborhoods. The four most significant side street sidewalk systems are Winter Street, Melcher Place, Wilson Street and the southern side of 196 west of the Main Street intersection.

Sidewalks through out the Main Street Village Area are typically four feet wide, composed of asphalt and directly adjacent to the road curb. A narrow grass median is located between the sidewalk and the street running south approximately from Gibbs to Melcher Place. South of this location, the sidewalks are directly adjacent to the road curb.

On the eastern side of Main Street, just south of the Finest Kind to the southern entrance to the Bowdoin Mill, the sidewalk is brick.

The sidewalks cross numerous curb cuts. Most of these curb cuts will remain, except in the Lower Village where there is an

opportunity to create a more defined pedestrian system with the redevelopment of the fire station parking lot and the Green Street intersection. More defined sidewalks and less curb cuts can be established with the development of the Town Hall complex on the western side of Main Street and the possibility of redevelopment opportunities south of the complex. The new Monument Place “parallel road” will include sidewalks tying into established neighborhoods improving connectivity between Main Street and the Topsham Fair Mall.

The neighborhoods least served by Main Street sidewalks are Forest Drive, Munroe Lane the scattered homes north of Canam Drive and the mobile home park at the end of Old Augusta Road.

### **Crosswalks**

There are nine crosswalks the entire length of Main Street from the Frank Wood Bridge to 295. Two pedestrian signals are located at the 196 intersection on the southern and eastern legs. One pedestrian signal is located on the eastern leg of the Elm Street intersection.



*Crosswalks at the 196 / Main Street intersection.*

The remaining seven crosswalks do not include pedestrian signals. The planned realignment of Monument Place at Main Street will not have either a traffic signal or a pedestrian signal. This will be a defining civic intersection, with the Town Hall Complex, the post office, the realigned Monument Place and the proposed town wide trail system converging at this point. A sidewalk and pedestrian signal is critical at this intersection for safe pedestrian connectivity. A well-designed crosswalk system at this intersection will also emphasize the importance of this area as a civic node on Main Street.

The location of the nine crosswalks:

1. The southern entrance to the Bowdoin Mill
2. Summer Street intersection
3. Green Street intersection
4. Thompsons Lane intersection
5. Elm Street intersection
6. Wilson Drive intersection
7. 196 intersection
8. Eagles Way intersection (leads nowhere)
9. Forest Drive intersection

The 2005 Gorrill-Palmer Transportation Plan makes the following recommendations for sidewalks and crosswalks on Main Street

- Add pedestrian crosswalk at southern entrance to the Bowdoin Mill to sidewalk leading to Frank Wood Bridge.
- Provide pedestrian signals on the southern leg of the intersection of Main Street/Elm Street
- Construct a sidewalk on the western side of Main Street from Rte 196 to Wilson Street with a crosswalk at Wilson Street allowing pedestrians to cross to the eastern sidewalk to access the Lower Village.
- Consider crosswalk with pedestrian actuated flasher in Lower Village, preferably just north of Summer Street.

## **Proposed Trails**

A trail system is proposed to cross Main Street at the new Monument Place. This trail system will connect to the proposed pedestrian bridge at the Highlands / 196 intersection and then head east along the utility line to Mount Ararat High School and west along the utility line to Topsham Crossing. The proposed trail is a critical first step in a town wide system of trails and sidewalks which will eventually create links between a range of civic spaces and buildings, open spaces, recreation areas and neighborhoods.

The first phase of the proposed trail system is not a direct benefit for Main Street. Utilizing the proposed elevated walk at the Highlands / 196 intersection, pedestrians wanting to continue down Main Street from Eagles Way to the proposed Town Hall complex must travel approximately 6,800 linear feet versus a direct connection across 196, which is approximately 800 linear feet. Also, while standing at the 196 intersection, the proposed pedestrian bridge is not visible from Main Street. The pedestrian bridge is a critical aspect to the trail plan, but it will not be a useful or visible aspect of Main Street, except for people coming from the Highlands, Topsham Crossing and beyond.

## **Bike Lanes**

The only marked bike lanes in the study area are on the northern and southern sides of 196, the eastern side of Main Street from 196 to Eagles Way and the western side of Main Street from 196 to 5<sup>th</sup> Street. However, there are stretches of road with adequate shoulder width for safe bike lanes located on both sides of Main Street in the Lower Village, and both sides of Main Street north of 196. The proposed trail system will create additional bike routes. See Figures 19 and 20.

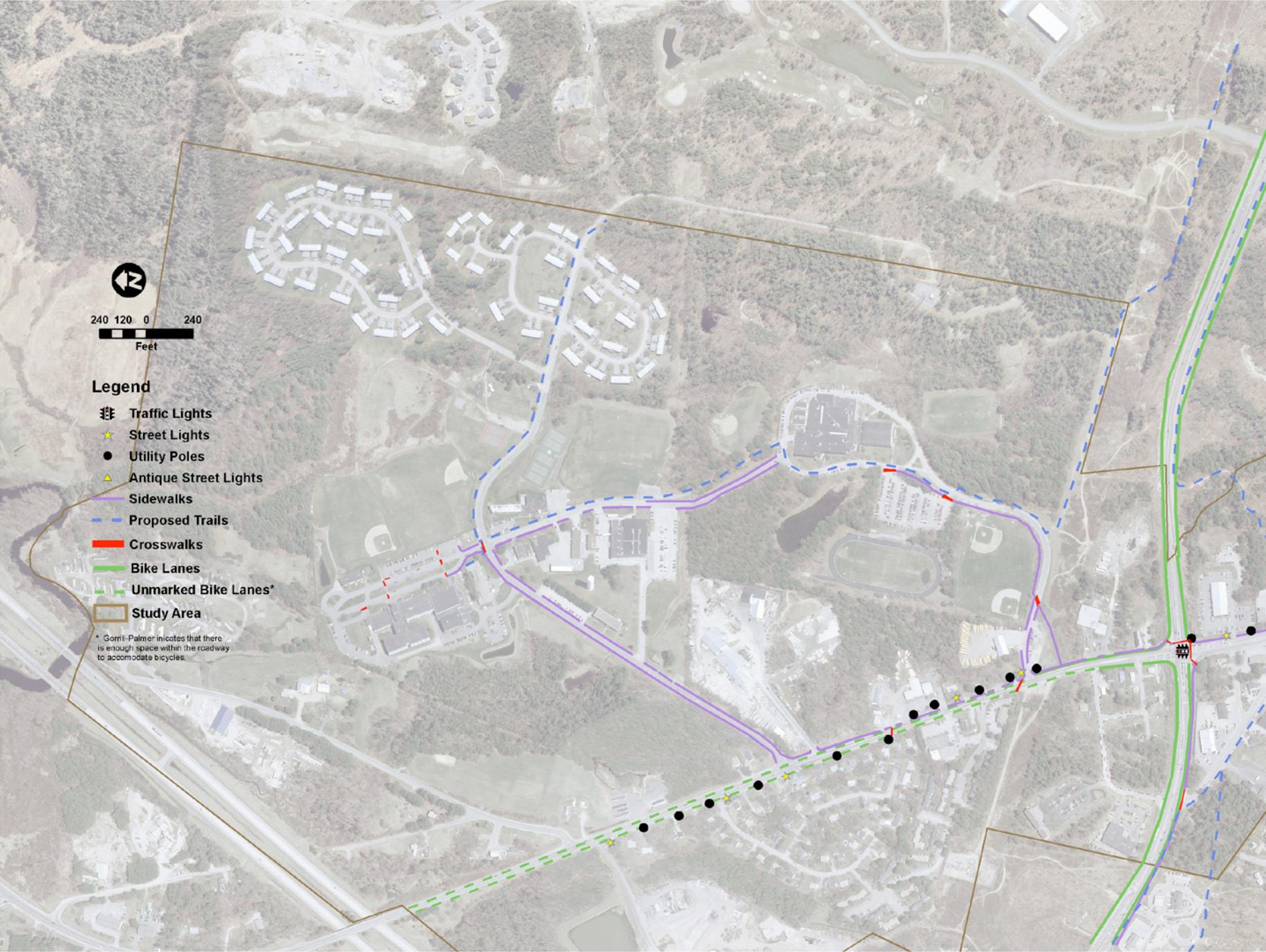
## Summary

- There are nine crosswalks on Main Street. Two include pedestrian signals.
- Sidewalks are located on the eastern side of Main Street with stubs into adjacent neighborhoods.
- There are marked and unmarked bikes lanes in the Main Street Village area.
- Streetlights are located on utility poles, except in the Lower Village south of Green Street where there are freestanding antique style streetlights.
- The proposed town wide trail system will eventually interface with Main Street at the convergence of the post office, the proposed Town Hall complex and the Monument Place extension. A proposed river trail will access the Lower Village and the proposed riverfront park.
- The proposed pedestrian bridge at the Highlands / 196 intersection is beneficial to the town, but has no direct benefits for Main Street. It will not be visible from the 196 intersection.
- Sidewalks are needed on the western side of the entire length of Main Street, where feasible.
- There are no unifying streetscape elements the two-mile length of Main Street such as streetlights, seating, landscaping, signage or other visible components. Is this necessary? Main Street includes many different scales and qualities. Is a common design treatment appropriate or should the streetscape treatment change in character with the neighborhoods?

Map 19: Topsham Main Street Village – Streetscape South of 196



Map 20: Topsham Main Street Village – Streetscape North of 196



### 3. Architecture

#### Topsham's Building Pattern and the Making of a Main Street

When working in harmony, all the elements that make up a main street – the road itself, the pedestrian access along the edges of the road, and the location and relationship of the buildings along the street – work together to create the sense of an outdoor room. In terms of the architecture along a main street, the issue of building use, building type, style, and even building quality are secondary to the primary concern of where the buildings are located in relationship to the street and each other.

Much of the existing built pattern in Topsham exemplifies a positive relationship of buildings to the street and adjacent properties. Some of the positive built patterns include:

- Buildings used to create a sense of Street Wall
- Buildings used to create a sense of nodes along Main Street, and
- Building setbacks and building heights to create pleasing proportions along Main Street

#### Street Walls and Street Nodes

When building facades face the street, maintain a consistent setback, and have enough proximity to each other and the street, the collective of buildings creates a container that makes a “sense of place.” This “sense of place” gives the impression that the road is secondary to the place that it is passing through, instead of an impression that the buildings are scattered along a road.

When the sense of Street Wall is lacking, the container along the street disappears. When the container disappears, the roadway dominates, and the buildings become secondary. No longer being located within a “sense of place,” the buildings have to resort to signage, signature style and gimmicks to seek some sense of identity.



*The Street Wall of the traditional village contains the curve. Buildings display a variety of styles and quality, but the overall impression is one of harmony.*

There are exceptions where the continuity of a Street Wall can be interrupted to create a Node without disrupting the “sense of place” along Main Street. Most successful Nodes are highlighted with landmark buildings that are setback by virtue of their public importance, and are fronted by a plaza or park. The cluster of homes in the Middle Village creates another example of a successful node in Topsham. Though it was most likely accidental, the collection of homes along one edge of the Middle Village has setbacks that work together to create a coherent open space between the homes. The homes that flank this cluster to on each end are close to the street, and each successive home, and it moves to the center of the cluster, moves progressively back from the street. Even though all the property is privately owned within this cluster, the effect is to produce a sense of collective open space that is visually shared and enjoyed by all who live there and those who pass by.



*Close proximity, similar heights, and consistent setback create a strong Street wall.*



*Weak street wall – undifferentiated parking in front, inconsistent setbacks, lack of architectural definition, and the lack of a pedestrian connection.*



*Cluster of homes in Middle Village creates a node along Main Street.*

## Street Sections

When a sense of Street Wall is established on both sides of the street, the facing street walls and the building heights creates a proportional relationship. When the proportional relationship is pleasing, the sense of Main Street as an outdoor room is accentuated. Generally, the proportional relationship can be perceived if the heights of the facing street walls and the distance between the street walls are no more than the ratio of 1:6.



*New structures in the Lower Village create a harmonious proportion (approximately 1:3) between the buildings' height and the distance between buildings. With this basic proportional space defined, the "fine tuning" of the space is created with building details, streetscape elements, and road treatments.*



*The traditional Village established facing Street Walls, which define a workable “outdoor room” between buildings. New streetscape elements (lights, benches, landscaping) could be added to create a secondary street wall, which would emphasize the proportional relationship along Main Street. Also note: the building at the end of this pictorial axis could be larger and more distinct to create a visual terminus. Landscaping along the street edge in front of that building would also help contain the visual axis, and create a comfort buffer between the building and traffic.*



*The proportional relationship between the street walls of house facades in the Middle Village is more relaxed than in the traditional Village, yet is still close enough to create a “sense of place.” Trees along the street help to reinforce this “outdoor room,” and create a secondary zone of the semi-public space in front of the houses.*



*The distance between the building on this portion of the Commercial Corridor, and the relative shortness of the buildings, does not create enough relationship to define the “outdoor room.” The sense of place is further eroded from the abundance of surface parking in front of the buildings, and the lack of any streetscape and pedestrian accommodation.*



*The closeness of these older homes to the road (seen here to the north of the Main Street/Coastal Connector intersection) helps contain the public space at the approach to the intersection. No such containment is evident from the southbound approach to the intersection.*

## The Relationship of Parking to Buildings

Needless to say, the traditional Topsham Village was built without regard to the modern reality of the car. The demands that vehicular traffic puts on Main Street creates constant pressure to expand road widths and add vehicular lanes which further erodes the amount of space available for the pedestrian realm. This simple equation is readily apparent, and most people are highly sensitized to the corrosive effects of excessive traffic to the public realm.

The impact of the car on the physical community is no less apparent once it is parked. Each car takes up approximately 350 square feet in parking space (including circulation area). Where the car is parked in relationship to the building and the street has a major impact on whether the “outdoor room” between buildings is perceived as a place for people that allows for cars to pass through, or a place for cars that reluctantly accommodates the minimal needs of the pedestrian. Fortunately, Topsham has many models for how to accommodate parking requirements while maintaining the prominence of the pedestrian realm on Main Street.



*Upper Village – Parking to the Side*

The simple strategy of placing the parking lot to the side of the building maintains the semi-public realm of the front yard and contributes to the sense of the pedestrian realm. In both examples above, the width of the parking area is considerably narrower than the width of the building and yard. If the side parking lot becomes wider than the width of the building, the street wall begins to unravel.



*Lower Village – Parking to the Side*



*This example places the parking lot to the back of the building. This is an effective strategy for hiding the parking lot, but creates another dilemma. The building entrance usually faces the parking lot, and as in this case, the side of the building that faces the street becomes, in effect, the back of the building. Though arguably better than a “sea of parking” in front of the building, having the building turn its back to the street diminishes the public realm of Main Street.*



This recently built example in the Lower Village places the parking behind the buildings, but creates building entries that relate to both the street and the parking lots. The entry plaza between the building entries becomes an extension of the sidewalk, and offers a clear sense of entry for both Main Street pedestrians and visitors who arrive in the parking lot.

and place the parking lot as one element – not the only element – in the transect from the street to the building.



*Wide curb cut, no sidewalks, no landscaping, undifferentiated parking configuration, no covered entry. Pedestrians need not apply.*



*Pedestrian challenged parking configurations*

The parking lot visually disconnects the building from Main Street. All the territory from the street to the building’s front door is ceded to the automobile with only a token sidewalk for pedestrians. The situation could be improved with streetscape amenities, buffering between the sidewalk and parking, and an extended, covered entry to the building. Collectively, these elements could create a layering of pedestrian zones that could reconnect the street wall,

### **Historic Properties**

The Lower Main Street District formed the original core of the town, and developed with a concentration of commercial use on the first floor with residential space in the second floor. The storefronts have been greatly modified over the years and in the case of certain buildings, may not have originally been used as a store. The space between public and private is much smaller in this district and is defied by the sidewalk and the building’s façade.

The Historic Overlay District established the review process for a property owner to seek a Certificate of Appropriateness for proposed work on a building. A town appointed Historic District Commission, which uses review criteria as established in the Ordinance and elaborated by the Guidelines in the Design Review Manual, conducts the review. The ordinance is also an “empowerment ordinance” which allows the adoption of other historic landmarks or districts.

In order to establish an historic district, a building inventory or survey is conducted of a proposed area to determine whether the buildings are “significant, contributing, or non-contributing” to the historic character of the area.

Building surveys were conducted sometime after the adoption of the empowerment ordinance to document the architecture of the current districts. Even though there are five separate districts, all

the districts are fairly consistent in style and character. The predominant styles include pattern book Federal (long orientation to the street) and Greek Revival (1820s) with gable to street that works on narrow, town lots. Other, later examples include Queen Anne, Italianate, and Colonial Revival.

The Historic District Overlay Zone as shown on Map 21 includes:

Main Street Properties in the Main Street Historic District

- 13 Main (lot 42) – The Olde Androscoggin Bank, c. 1834
- 19 Main (lot 40) – Grocery store, c. 1880
- 21 Main (lot 39) – Grocery store, c. 1890
- 22 Main (lot 16) – Porter & King General Store, c. 1800
- 25 Main (lot 38) – house, 1850
- 34 Main (lot 136) – Walker-Wilson House, c. 1800
- 36 Main (lot 2) – Haskell House, c. 1820

Main Street Properties in the National Register District

- 41 Main (lot 40) – General Samuel Veazie house, c. 1820
- 42 Main (lot 4) – house, by 1877
- 43 Main (lot 41) – Baptist Parsonage, c. 1857 – 1877
- 45 Main (lot 42) – H.P. Mallet House, by 1857
- 47 Main (lot 43) – J. Haskell House, by 1857

In addition to the above listed properties, the surveys include the following:

- Elm Street: 42 houses surveyed
- Winter Street: 10 buildings surveyed
- Green Street: 12 houses surveyed
- Summer Street: 7 houses surveyed
- Perkins Street: 3 houses surveyed
- Pleasant Street: 9 houses surveyed
- Melcher Place: 1 house surveyed

It has been a number of years since the above noted surveys were completed. This Historic District may want to expand to preserve village character, but careful review of the Ordinances is required to avoid conflicts between “smart growth” and historic preservation



*An example of one of the many historic homes in the Lower and Middle Village Zones.*

**Summary**

- The Lower Village includes historic and new buildings close to the street creating a sense of pedestrian scale. Although the use is primarily commercial, the Lower Village is visually appealing to most people. The street is not dominant. It is part of an overall sense of civic space.
- The Middle Village is defined by homes close to the street, but has an overall more historic single-family residential character, including mature trees, than the Lower Village.
- The Commercial Corridor includes large scale developments with retail style architecture, an open feel that is not pedestrian friendly, but practical for cars and high visibility businesses.
- The Upper Village includes a range of undeveloped lands with a rural feel, generic commercial developments and little sense of place.
- The historic district includes properties in the Lower and Middle Village Zones.

- In general, building style is secondary to the building patterns in the different zones. Buildings closer to the street with a proportional scale create more safe, pedestrian oriented spaces. The variety of architecture, be it modern or historic, and the intensity of the use, be it residential or auto dealership, is not as critical as the location and scale of the buildings in relationship to the street and to each other.
- The building pattern – the relationship of buildings to the street and to each other – for much of Topsham’s Main Street reinforce a sense of the public realm that is a required ingredient to creating a vibrant Main Street. Issues of individual architectural style and quality are secondary to this fundamental relationship of building pattern.
- Streetscaping, façade improvements, and signage can reinforce the quality of Main Street where the buildings form a sense of street wall, and the container within the street walls create perceivable, proportional spaces. In other locations along Main Street, it will be important to encourage future building patterns repair and extend the street wall. The basic elements in doing so will include appropriate building setbacks, building heights, placement and treatment of the building’s entry, and placement of parking. These structural elements could be encouraged through a variety of regulatory means (e.g., build-to lines instead of setback lines in the zoning; or the adoption of design standards).
- The historic districts in Topsham have identified and protect most of the significant historic resources along Main Street. The exception is the portion of Main Street in the Middle Village from Wilson Street to Pleasant Street. This section of Main Street contains many primarily nineteenth century homes, and could benefit from the guidance of historic preservation review. For the remainder of the Study Area (Pleasant Street to I-295) fewer than an half-dozen structure remain that appear to predate the twentieth century, and none of these (originally farmhouses all) are in close enough proximity to create a pocket district. These structures could be further

researched, and if deemed significant, could be granted landmark status to ensure that future modifications receive review under the Secretary of Interior Standards. In short, Topsham is working with a blank slate on how to establish an architectural stylistic vision for future development along the Commercial Corridor and the Upper Village. Architectural styles and materials could have some continuity to the historic districts of Main Street, or could take a departure. Either approach can work as long as good design and quality materials are used. More fundamental to the future of Topsham is that building relationships establish the proper building pattern to allow for the development of a Main Street Village.

Map 21: Topsham Main Street Village – Historic District



## 4. Landscape / Civic Spaces / Gateways

### Landscape

The prime visual landscape resource in the Main Street Village area is the Androscoggin River. The river is the key southern gateway along with iconic presence of the Frank Wood Bridge and the Bowdoin Mill. However, after crossing the bridge, the presence of the river in the Lower Village is not significant. A proposed riverfront park adjacent to the existing fire station will create panoramic views of the river and be the most significant and destination civic space along Main Street.

Other natural area landscapes of note on Main Street include a ravine to the west of Main Street running between Wilson Drive and Winter Street, the lands to the south and west of the Volvo dealership, a small ravine between the Bowdoin Mill and the fire station (with the potential for the existing bridge to become a footbridge) and a rural field along Old Augusta Road in the Upper Village.



*A view north of the “apple orchard” with a car dealership in the adjacent Commercial Corridor Zone.*

The “orchard” field along at the northern edge of the Middle Village was noted during the public forums as important to preserve in conjunction with several abutting properties. It is also a buffer between the Commercial Corridor and Middle Village Zones and is in walking distance of two schools, established neighborhoods and the proposed Town Hall complex.



*This undeveloped gully in the Lower Village does not have a strong visual presence on Main Street. However, areas such as this are valuable, providing places of refuge, exploration and wildlife habitat.*

In terms of treescapes, the Lower Village is nouveau historic / village scaled, the Middle Village includes large mature trees blended with the architecture and adding to the visual quality of the neighborhood, the Commercial Corridor is more strip mall planting style and the Upper Village includes stands of trees between developments and on undeveloped lots, creating a more rural feel, but not reinforcing the streetscape and the architecture.

There is very little designated open space / park land in the Main Street Area and what does exist currently has little impact on the overall visual quality of the area. These areas include:

- Monument Place Park
- Two slivers of buffer land on both sides of the 196 intersection on the north side of 196
- The CMP ROW (future location of trail system)
- A triangle shaped piece of land on the western side of Main Street adjacent to 295 (possibly an vestige of an off ramp)

Old Augusta Road includes a rolling agricultural field that is a distinct landscape feature near Main Street. The field does not have the dramatic impact of the Androscoggin River as viewed from the bridge, but it a transition from the Main Street Village area to the growth boundary line. In many communities this type of field is susceptible to sprawl development, which is often the only option for the landowner. Efforts should be made to preserve this field. The town-wide trail system should link the field with other important open spaces and corridors in town.



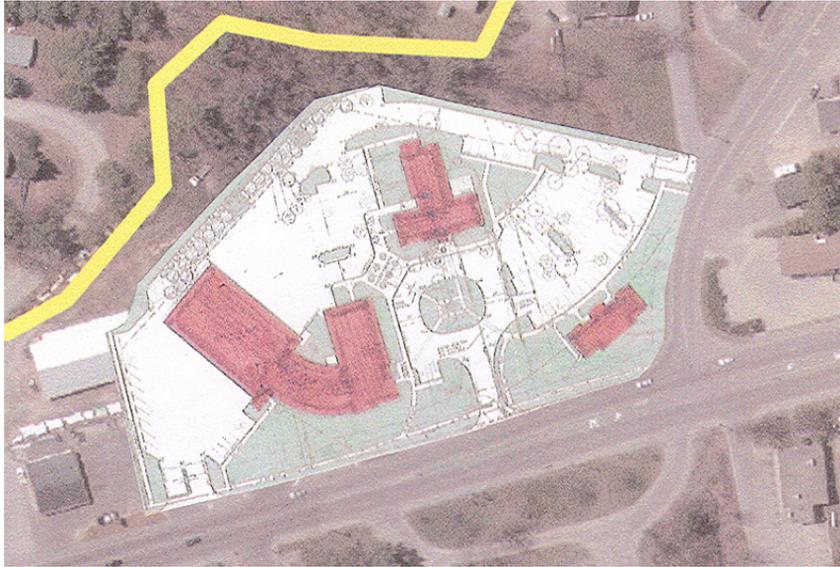
*This field at the intersection of Main Street and Old Augusta Road should be preserved and integrated into a master plan for the area. The field could also become a defining gateway element in the Upper Village.*

## Civic Spaces

As noted on Map 22, the Main Street Village area includes a series of overlapping pedestrian sheds making Main Street a defining spine as Topsham’s village center. As depicted, each pedestrian shed circle has a radius of 1,500 feet equivalent to a five-minute walk. When viewed in total, the pedestrian sheds emphasize the critical role of adjacent neighborhoods in supporting a healthy and civic Main Street.

With the planned development of the Town Hall and the Androscoggin park, the only primary civic building that will not be located in the Main Street is the new library on River Road. This is a major accomplishment for the Town.

Moving the Municipal Public Works operation from the Lower Village and the impending relocation of the fire station to the proposed Town Hall complex at the Monument Place intersection is good long-term planning. It has been suggested that the post office be moved to a new location, but it must remain somewhere on Main Street, ideally in the current location. Civic buildings establish and reinforce civic spaces, ultimately promoting walkable communities.



*The proposed site plan for the Town Hall complex at the intersection of Main Street and Monument Place. The post office is located at the visual terminus for Monument Place. The concentration of civic uses will define this area as a new village center. The site plan for the Town Hall complex has been criticized because the parking should be behind the buildings and the buildings close to the front setback, reinforcing the street wall.*

The key civic buildings and pedestrian sheds in the Main Street Village area and zone of influence include:

- The proposed Androscoggin park adjacent to the fire station
- The church at the Elm Street intersection
- The church in the Middle Village
- The Grange Hall
- The post office
- The proposed Town Hall complex
- Mount Ararat High School
- Mount Ararat Middle School
- The Woodside School
- Williams Cone School



*View towards the future Androscoggin Park. Redevelopment of the area should create a visual / pedestrian connection between Main Street and the park. When the pump station is upgraded it should be relocated from the middle of the site for a more efficient use of the land.*

Main Street does not have civic spaces creating community identity. The Mount Ararat Middle and High School campuses are certainly important civic landscapes. Playfields are probably more relevant and practical as modern day town commons, but Main Street would benefit from an iconic civic space and the riverfront park if properly designed, including the adjacent building and parking, will be an unparallel focal point.

The Middle Village and the Lower Village are also important civic spaces anchoring Main Street in both Topsham's past and future. As noted before, the proper proportion between architecture and the street achieves this. The street becomes part of an "outdoor room" as the sidewalk and the building edge contain the civic energy, rather than releasing it with deep setbacks and expanses of parking.

Map 22: Topsham Main Street Village – Overlapping Pedestrian Sheds: 1,500' Radius = 5 Minute Walk





*A concept plan for the riverfront park in the Lower Village. The development of the park is an opportunity to rethink the layout of the buildings on Main Street, off-street parking and even the layout and direction of traffic on adjacent streets.*

## **Gateways**

As noted on Map 23 there are four primary gateways to the Main Street Village area and four minor local gateways. These gateways are all different in nature, just as Main Street has distinct areas.

Gateways are often over emphasized in town planning. Signage or landscaped “entrances” are not normally at a scale or of visual significance to act as an effective gateway. A significant building, neighborhood or natural feature is a more effective gateway than a “welcome” sign. The development of gateways should focus on the creation / preservation of significant neighborhoods and buildings, the careful development of focal points or the preservation of outstanding natural resources such as stands of trees, a river or a field.

Coordinated signage and other common themes can provide a sense of continuity. But continuity should not override the innate positive aspects of the different parts of Main Street.

The four major gateways include:

- Frank Wood Bridge / Bowdoin Mill to the south
- 295 overpass to the north
- Elm Street to the west
- The 196 intersection

The bridge and mill are clear, iconic gateways. Elm Street with the historic homes, Town Hall and the restored Frost House also creates a well-defined and welcoming threshold to Main Street.



*The Bowdoin Mill and the Androscoggin River combined are the key southern gateway to Main Street.*



*The Elm Street gateway to Main Street is defined by existing historic buildings, particularly the church steeple and the yellow house.*



*The 196 / Main Street intersection is the most problematic gateway to the Main Street Village Area.*

The 196 intersection is certainly a visible gateway, but in the process makes Main Street invisible. It is the most critical juncture / gateway on Main Street. At the public forums, the overwhelming response is that this is the most unsafe and visually unappealing part of Main Street. Current traffic standards make it difficult to mitigate the impact of 196 on Main Street, but visual and management design solutions working within the parameters of traffic safety needs are required. Solutions making the intersection more pedestrian friendly are the most critical.

As noted previously, the redevelopment of the Monument Place realignment intersection adjacent to the proposed Town Hall complex across from the post office could be an important gateway to Main Street just south of the 196. This gateway could mitigate the negative impact of the 196 intersection.

The I-295 overpass to the north currently has a rural feel, but does not clearly mark the entrance to Main Street. This is not necessarily bad. Main Street is dynamic and antique streetlights and brick sidewalks could appear out of place in this area. Both the 196 intersection and the I-295 crossing will benefit from appropriate, location specific design solutions.

There are four minor local gateways on Main Street:

- The proposed Monument Place intersection
- Wilson Street intersection
- Winter Street intersection
- Summer Street intersection

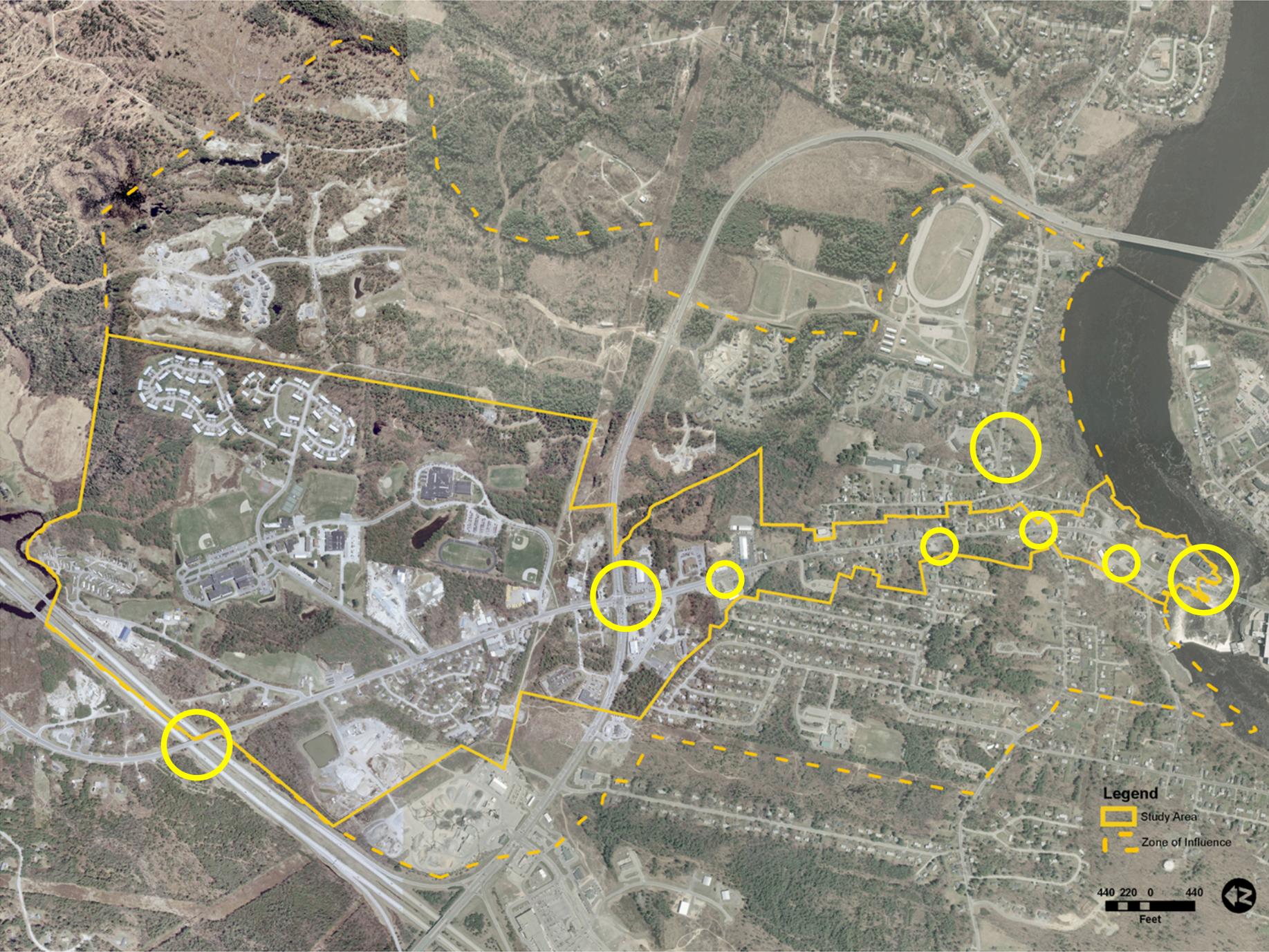
When the BNAS Annex is redeveloped and if Eagles Way becomes a one-way street exiting at Canam Drive, Canam Drive will become another minor local gateway. The same can be said for the future Main Street intersection of the proposed Eastside connector running parallel to I-295 across the Crooker land.

Gateways should not only serve people arriving to the Main Street Village, but also act as local thresholds.

## **Landscape / Civic Spaces / Gateways Summary**

- Landscape within in the Main Street area runs the gamut from the stunning Androscoggin River to undevelopable ravines, undeveloped fields and small stands of woods and larger agricultural lands. Landscape in the Lower Village, Middle Village, Commercial Corridor and the Upper Village vary in sense of place. It is important to respect these variations and find ways to either preserve what is considered important or correct what is seen as lacking.
- Landscape is not a dominant character along Main Street except for a limited number of open spaces and undevelopable lands.
- Street trees play a limited role in defining Main Street, but could be an important ingredient for creating a sense of pedestrian scale and calming traffic by making Main Street feel more confined. Trees in the Middle Village are part of the pattern of historic properties. Trees in the Upper Village are part of undeveloped lands. Trees in the Commercial Corridor are not visually significant, but are an important component of Site Plan Review.
- There are no civic spaces of significance along Main Street. The “orchard” site and the riverfront park have the greatest potential for establishing civic space on Main Street.
- The schools in the Upper Village create a campus landscape setting, but this is not apparent from Main Street.
- The key gateways to Main Street are the 196 intersection, the Androscoggin River, the I-295 overpass and the Elm Street approach to Main Street. The 196 intersection is more of a bulldozer pushing across and subordinating Main Street rather than marking this as a regional / local crossroads. The I-295 overpass doesn't provide a visual sense of transition to Main Street.
- Minor local gateways include Monument Place realignment, Wilson, Winter and Summer Street intersections. In the future, Canam Drive will be an important local gateway along with the “Eastside” road on the Crooker property.
- Gateways of significant architectural, landscape or neighborhood quality such as the Bowdoin Mill and the Elm Street neighborhood are more effective than landscaped signage and other standard gateway amenities. A cohesive design strategy can be developed at the key and local gateways. These gateway design treatments must be of a scale and style that is legible at the speed of a car.

Map 23: Topsham Main Street Village – Major and Minor Gateways



## 5. Infrastructure

Public sewer, water, power and high-speed data serve the Main Street Village Area.

### Water:

There is adequate water service for the Study Area. Additional improvements and capacity may be required in the Upper Village depending on future land use.

Water service runs from the Frank Wood Bridge to Canam Drive. Water service was upgraded in 2000 from the Volvo dealership south as part of the Main Street improvements. In this area connections to lots were renewed within the ROW. A typical home connection is 3" and a commercial connection is 6".

A 12" cast iron line runs from the bridge to Winter Street. A new 12" ductile iron line dating from 2000 runs from Winter Street to the Volvo dealership.

A combination of 12" PVC and ductile iron line dating from the early 1980's runs from the Volvo dealership to 196.

An 8" asbestos cement pipe installed in the 1950's runs north from 196 to Canam drive serving the Annex and Middle School. North of Canam Drive all lots are served by wells.

### Sewer:

There is adequate sewer capacity south of 196, except the pump station in the Lower Village (in the fire station parking lot) needs to be replaced due to wear and age. When this pump station is replaced it should also be relocated to better utilize the area in the development of the Androscoggin park. North of 196 the sewer runs to the northern entrance to Forest Drive and the system is at capacity. Sewer does not serve Main Street north of Forest Drive. A sewer line was placed across the Mount Ararat Middle School property to the mobile home park to the north, but a connection has not yet been made. This greatly impacts the

development capacity of this land. The Annex and the Middle School are currently tied into the Main Street line.

Numerous sewer changes are proposed within the study area, mainly to handle development at the Topsham Fair Mall and anticipated development at the 196 / 295 interchange quadrants and any land use changes at the Annex and lands north of Canam drive. The new pump station in the Annex and at the Highlands in concert with the proposed pump station in the northwestern quadrant of the interchange area will divert sewer from the existing Main Street area eventually increasing capacity. These improvements are part of a town wide plan and will only increase capacity in the study area.



*A sewer line runs to a mobile home park north of the Mount Ararat Middle School. The strategic extension of the sewer allows for a range of redevelopment opportunities.*

## Infrastructure Summary

- The Main Street Village area is in general well served by all utilities. Water does not exist north of Canam Drive. Sewer has been extended north of Canam Drive to the mobile home park via the Middle School property, but it is not in service.
- The pumping station in the Lower Village fire station parking lot needs to be upgraded. This is an opportunity to relocate it in the vicinity for a more efficient use of space in the development of a riverfront park, parking and new buildings.
- Numerous sewer and water changes are planned for the area as the 196/295 quadrants are developed (although the intensity of development is in question because the area is now part of an urban imperiled watershed.) The proposed infrastructure improvements have been planned to increase and upgrade utilities along Main Street.
- The Main Street Village area is served by high speed Internet. There is the possibility that Main Street may become an extension of the wi-fi zone under consideration for Maine Street in Brunswick.

## II. ECONOMIC AND HOUSING CONDITIONS

### Introduction

This section of the Existing Conditions Analysis examines the underlying economic and housing conditions in the Village Area, the Town of Topsham and the Bath-Brunswick region as a whole. The purpose of this section is to document both quantitative data and the opinions of real estate professionals and local landowners regarding the opportunities for and constraints on future economic and housing development in the Village Area.

This report presents a blend of demographic/economic data, opinions of local stakeholders and conclusions reached by MRLD. The report is structured as a narrative that includes all of these elements side by side. Factual data are noted and sourced—all other comments are based on the opinions shared by stakeholders and the conclusions reached by MRLD.

Stakeholders who were interviewed during the process were told that their comments would remain anonymous, so no opinions are attributed to specific individuals. The following stakeholders were contacted by the MRLD team:

- Tim Brillant – Brillant Motors
- Dan Catlin – Broker/Developer, Commercial Properties, Inc.
- Ted Crooker – Harry C. Crooker and Sons
- Dr. Fred Findlen, DDS
- Frank Goodwin – Goodwin Volvo
- Terry Gray – Precast Products of Maine
- Jim Howard – Developer, Priority Group LLC
- Adam Lee – Lee Automotive Group
- Jim Michaud – Michaud's Market
- John Noyes – Picture Framer
- Harold Sandelin – Sandelin Concrete
- Sue Spann – Realtor, ReMAX Riverside
- Ross Depencier – Maine Event
- James – Dairy Queen

### Demographic and Economic Profile

Topsham is located at a major crossroads in Maine. The Town is located halfway between the state's largest city (Portland) and its capital (Augusta). The Coastal Connector (Route 196), which is the primary means of accessing the entire Midcoast region, bisects Topsham's Main Street. As such, future economic and housing development opportunities in the Village Area depend quite heavily on conditions in the larger region.

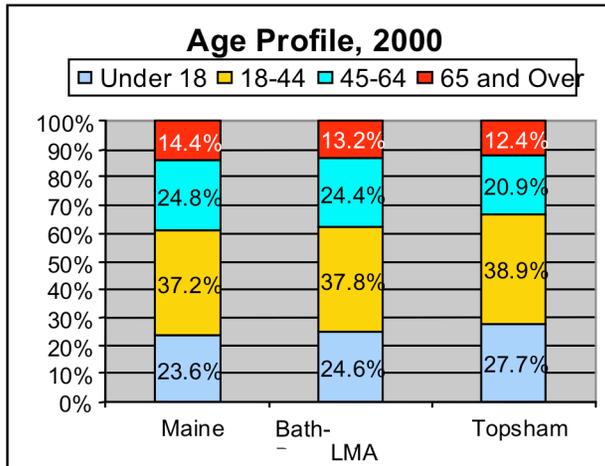
#### Townwide Demographic Profile

Topsham is located in the Bath-Brunswick Labor Market Area (LMA). This area comprises all of Sagadahoc County, plus the towns of Durham (Androscoggin County), Brunswick, Harpswell, New Gloucester and Pownal (Cumberland County), Alna, Dresden, Westport and Wiscasset (Lincoln County). From 1990 to 2004, U.S. Census estimates show that the population of the LMA grew from 73,389 to 81,616, a percentage increase of 11.2%. This is considerably higher than the statewide population growth rate during the same period of 7.3%.

According to the Census Bureau's 2004 estimates, Topsham is now the second largest town in the LMA, having surpassed Bath since 2000. Topsham's 2004 estimated population of 9,831 represents an increase of 1,085 persons above its 1990 Census count of 8,746 (12.4% increase). More than half of its growth has been since 2000, when the population was 9,282.

The age profile of the Bath-Brunswick LMA matches that of the State of Maine fairly closely, but Topsham is a younger community than the region and the state. Topsham has a particularly large share of children under the age of 18 (28%) and a small share of persons between 45 and 64 (21%). This proportion is likely to shift for two reasons: 1) Senior-oriented developments like the Highlands will increase the population of those aged 55 and over; and 2) Regional birth rates suggest that the population under 18 will be decreasing in the coming years statewide.

**Figure 1:  
Age Profile  
Comparison,  
2000**

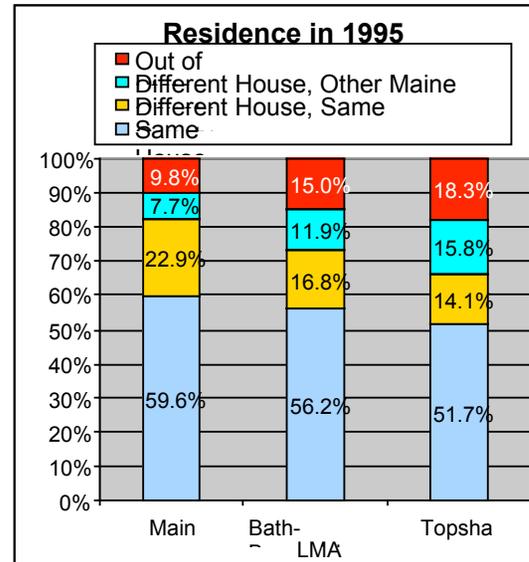


There is also likely to be a decline in the number of children from the closure of Brunswick Naval Air Station (BNAS), as there are more than 100 MSAD 75 students living in Topsham whose families are employed at BNAS.

Residents of Topsham and the Bath-Brunswick LMA are far more likely to have migrated to the area from elsewhere than are people elsewhere in Maine. The chart to the right shows the place of residence in 1995 for respondents to the 2000 Census. More than 34% of people living in Topsham in 2000 lived outside of Sagadahoc County in 1995, an indication that the Town is both growing and seeing substantial turnover. By comparison, just 17% of all Maine residents in 2000 lived in a different county in 1995.

Figure 2 shows migration patterns from 1995 to 2000.

**Figure 2:  
Residence in 1995 of 2000 Residents**



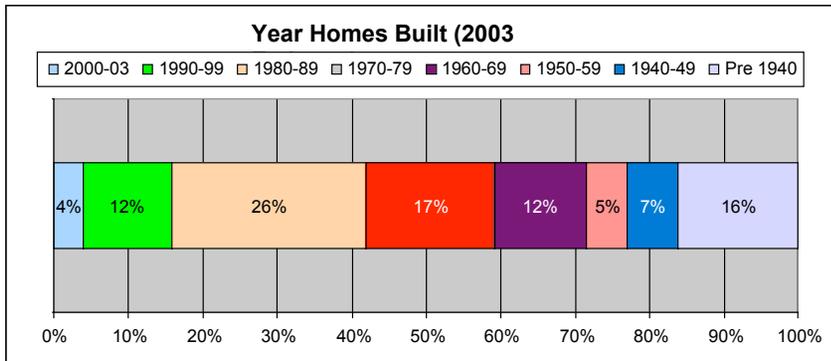
**Housing Profile**

The recently adopted Topsham Comprehensive Plan presented housing data from 2003. As of 2003, there were 3,828 housing units in the town. Of this amount, about 70% were in single-family units in the town. Of this amount, about 70% were in single-family structures, 5% were in duplexes, 16% were in multi-family structures and 9% were mobile homes.

Topsham’s housing stock is fairly young relative to those of the region and the state. According to 2000 Census data, about 39% of Topsham’s housing units had been built since 1980, compared with 27% statewide and 36% of the Bath-Brunswick LMA.

Figure 3 depicts the age of Topsham’s housing stock from 2003 as shown in the Comprehensive Plan. From 2000 to 2003, there were 150 new units built, an average of 50 per year. In 2003, the share of units built since 1980 rose to 42%.

**Figure 3:  
Age of Topsham's Housing Stock**



The Comprehensive Plan also looked at the characteristics of housing in various sections of Topsham, though the geography did not match up with the village study area. Parts of the village study area fell within the boundaries of three of the five different geographic areas presented in the Comprehensive Plan (Downtown, Crossroads and Cathance). From 1990 to 2003 there was virtually no new housing development in either the Downtown or Crossroads areas, and both of these areas have mostly older housing. However, there has been interest in adding housing in these areas since 2003, particularly the proposed 60-unit Mallett Woods cluster townhome development in the Crossroads area.

The Cathance area, which includes all portions of the Village Study area north and east of the intersection of Routes 201 and 24, saw significant housing development from 1990 to 2003, in part due to The Highlands. This area should continue to see strong residential development as existing developments like The Highlands and Topsham Crossing are built out and new developments take advantage of public utilities and new roads.

The Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) includes Topsham in the Brunswick Housing Market, along with Brunswick, Harpswell, the rest of Sagadahoc County and parts of Lincoln County. Since

2000, housing affordability has become a growing problem in the Brunswick Housing Market. The median home sale price in the market increased from \$123,000 in 2000 to \$183,000 in 2004, representing an actual increase of \$60,000 and an annual growth rate of 10.4%.

As the median home price has increased, incomes have not kept pace. The 2000 median household income for the housing market was \$41,267. By 2004 it had only grown to \$45,197; this represents an annual growth rate of 2.3%. In other words, the median home price in the area has outpaced the median household income by a factor of greater than four.

MSHA's measure of housing affordability is the Affordability Index, which compares the value that a household earning the regional median can afford with the actual median sales price. Table 1 below shows the 2004 Affordability Index for Topsham and the surrounding area.

**Table 1:  
Housing Affordability Index, 2004**

Location	Median Household Income	Median Affordable Home	Median Sale Price	Affordability Index
Topsham	\$53,897	\$155,472	\$189,500	0.82
Brunswick	\$43,813	\$125,203	\$200,000	0.63
Harpswell	\$45,340	\$143,991	\$480,000	0.30
Bath	\$39,032	\$109,208	\$159,000	0.69
Bowdoin	\$46,266	\$132,374	\$185,600	0.71
Bowdoinham	\$50,140	\$141,800	\$165,000	0.86
Brunswick Housing Market	\$45,197	\$131,885	\$183,000	0.72
Maine Totals	\$41,929	\$122,310	\$168,000	0.73

Source: Maine State Housing Authority

State data suggest that Topsham has actually remained one of the more affordable towns in the Brunswick market. In 2004, Topsham's affordability index of 0.82 was the second highest in its immediate area, with only Bowdoinham being more affordable at 0.86. However, this is partially due to Topsham's median household income level of nearly \$54,000, which is nearly \$9,000 greater than that of the entire housing market. If the Brunswick Housing Market's median income level of \$45,197 were applied

to Topsham's 2004 median sale price of \$189,500, Topsham's affordability index would have been 0.70.

In other words, a household earning the median income for the Brunswick region could only afford to pay 70% of the total price of purchasing a median-priced home in Topsham. Still, Topsham is more affordable than nearby coastal areas. Harpswell is by far the least affordable town in the region, with a median sale price in 2004 of \$480,000. Brunswick's median sale price of \$200,000 was also higher than Topsham's. The two Inland towns in MSAD 75, Bowdoin and Bowdoinham, are more affordable than is Topsham and have experienced increased demand for their housing stocks.

### Economic Profile

From an economic standpoint, Topsham is mostly a bedroom community, though its employment base has been on the rise in recent years. As of 2004, the Maine Department of Labor reported a total of 3,325 at-place jobs in the Town. Compared with the town's estimated 2004 population of 9,831, Topsham's jobs to population ratio is 33.8%. By comparison, Brunswick's ratio is about 57% and Portland's is about 105%.

Most of the jobs in Topsham are in service and retail industries. Maine Department of Labor data show that 52% of jobs in town are in the Service sector and another 25% are in the Retail sector. The only other substantial employment sector in Topsham is Construction, which comprises 10% of all jobs in Town. Many of the Construction jobs in Topsham are concentrated at the three concrete plants located in the Upper Village area (Harry C. Crooker and Sons, Sandelin Concrete and Precast Products of Maine).

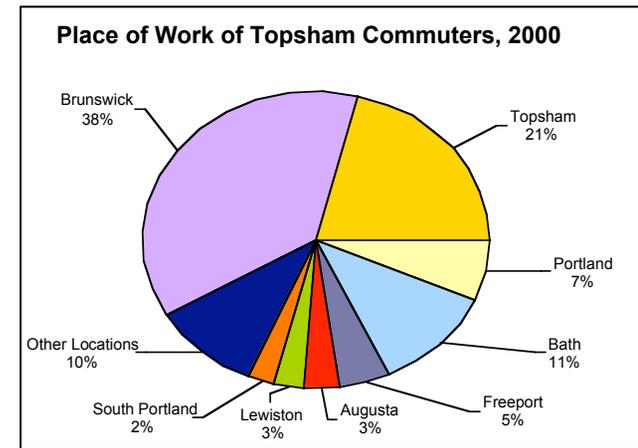
As of 2000, about one-third of the jobs in Topsham were filled by Town residents. Another third were filled by residents of the area immediately surrounding Topsham (Brunswick Harpswell, Lisbon,

Bowdoin and Bowdoinham). The remaining third came from areas scattered around Topsham in all directions.

Topsham residents are likely to commute out of Town in order to access employment. In 2000, just 21% of the 4,559 commuters living in Town also worked within the Town's boundaries. The leading destination for Topsham commuters was Brunswick, more than one-third of Topsham residents were employed in 2000. Other common destinations were Bath (12%), Portland (7%) and Freeport (5%).

Figure 4 shows where Topsham commuters worked in 2000.

**Figure 4:**  
**Place of**  
**Work of**  
**Topsham**  
**Commuters**  
**in 2000**



According to the *BRAC Preparedness Strategy* completed by the Town of Brunswick in May of 2005, there are about 450 employees at Brunswick Naval Air Station (BNAS) who live in Topsham (roughly 375 military and 75 civilian). These employees represent about 10% of Topsham's labor force, and this does not include other members of military households who are part of the local workforce.

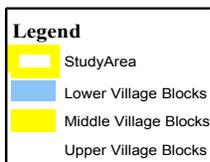
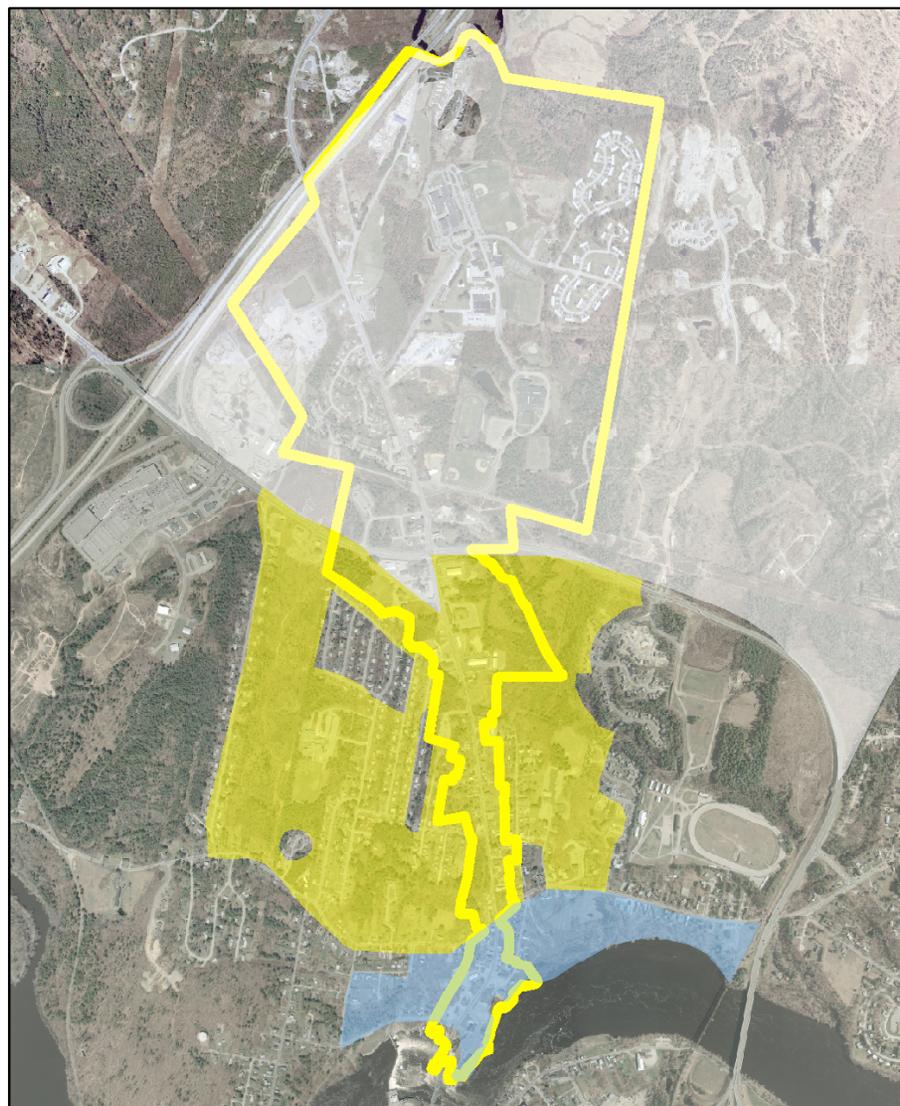
There will undoubtedly be losses in the area's labor force, but not necessarily its job base, as a result of the closure of BNAS.

### Village Area Profile

Demographic data on the village area were computed by matching up Census blocks (the smallest unit of Census geography available) with the study area. Though these lines do not match up exactly, they are mostly compatible with each other. The Census geography for the village area was split into three sub-areas that roughly correspond with the project study area's boundaries for the Lower, Middle and Upper villages.

The map to the right illustrates the Census block boundaries for the village area and the three sub-areas. Though the block area of Upper Village reaches well outside the study area, there was very little development in this portion of the block as of 2000. As The Highlands is developed, the geography of this block is very likely to be altered for the 2010 Census. Total buildout of the Highlands is expected to be about 450 units.

Topsham's village area comprises only a small portion of the Town's total population. According to 2000 Census data, the population of the Census blocks that comprise the Village area was 1,430. This accounts for about 15% of Topsham's total population. Of this amount, the Lower and Middle Village each have about 400 residents and the Upper Village has about 600 (including the Naval Annex housing).



**Main Street Village Plan  
Census Block Sub-Areas  
Topsham, Maine**



Table 2 compares the population and housing characteristics of the three sub-areas with each other and with the Town as a whole.

**Table 2:**  
**Census Profile of Village Areas and Town of Topsham**

	Topsham	Lower Village	Middle Village	Upper Village	Village Total	% of Town
<b>2000 Population</b>	9,282	421	402	607	<b>1,430</b>	15.4%
<b>Households</b>	3,445	147	203	181	<b>531</b>	15.4%
<b>Housing Units</b>	3,573	153	221	189	<b>563</b>	15.8%
<b>Age Profile, 2000</b>						
Under 18	27.7%	21.1%	11.9%	38.9%	26.1%	
18-44	38.9%	35.6%	24.6%	47.0%	37.3%	
45-64	20.9%	19.5%	11.9%	11.9%	14.1%	
65 and Over	12.4%	23.8%	51.5%	2.3%	22.4%	
<b>Housing Tenure</b>						
Owner Occupied	71.0%	61.9%	30.5%	56.4%	48.0%	
Renter Occupied	29.0%	38.1%	69.5%	43.6%	52.0%	

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

The characteristics of the three sub-areas of the village are actually quite different from one another in terms of the age of the population and the percentages of owners and renters. The Upper Village has a very young population, with 39% of its residents being under the age of 18 and another 47% between 18 and 44. By contrast, more than half of the Middle Village’s residents are over the age of 65.

The Middle Village also has a very high concentration of renters; more than two thirds of its housing units are renter-occupied. More than 60% of residents of the Lower Village own their own homes.

## Real Estate Market Conditions

### Commercial Development Profile

Commercial development in Topsham is primarily located along two roads: Route 196 (Coastal Connector) and Route 201 (Main Street). Route 196 is home to the Topsham Fair Mall, which is currently undergoing a major expansion. When complete, the Mall may contain up to one million square feet of retail space. There are a number of other retail development plans in the pipeline which will likely add substantially to the Town’s retail inventory.

Main Street, the focus of this study contains four distinct areas in terms of existing commercial development:

- **Lower Village** contains many small professional office and retail uses. Its employment base has exploded in recent years with the redevelopment of the Bowdoin Mill area. In addition to the historic Mill itself, several other office buildings have been built in the surrounding area and two more office buildings broke ground in September, 2005. These two new buildings comprise 46,000 square feet of office space.
- **Middle Village** is a largely residential area that has seen several of its older homes converted into office and service uses. This transition has led to tension between residents and the new businesses coming in. The two specific issues at hand are parking requirements and the maximum allowable square footage of commercial businesses.
- The **Commercial Corridor** comprises the area between Middle Village and Route 196. It is a transitioning area that currently contains mostly automobile-oriented businesses, including three automobile dealerships. The Town has voted to locate Town Hall and police and fire services to a new municipal campus in this area.
- **Upper Village** runs from Route 196 to the Route 201 bridge over Interstate 295. This stretch contains several automobile-oriented retail and service businesses, the Naval Annex, three concrete plants and the Mt. Ararat Middle School, High School and Adult Education complex.

## Real Estate Market Conditions

To assess market conditions, the MRLD team relied on information provided by local developers, realtors, brokers and business owners, as they have an intimate knowledge of the recent trends and future prospects of the local real estate market.

Summaries of these discussions have been divided into four separate categories of conclusions: 1) General market conditions; 2) Housing market; 3) Retail market; and 4) Office/Industrial market. These summaries follow.

### 1. General Market Conditions

- There will be several different effects of the closure of BNAS:
  - As the base closes, families being cycled into Brunswick are going to rent, not buy. This will cause strong demand for rental units in short term, especially detached single-family. However, once the base closes, the availability of sale units will likely cause the rental market to experience a loss of demand.
  - The regional labor market may lose some low-wage workers as other members of military households leave with their spouses or parents.
  - Some late career military personnel will retire and start businesses locally.
  - The Commissary at the Annex may remain viable, as 60% of its business comes from retirees.
- Bath Iron Works is planning to cut 2,500 jobs in the coming years. Given the fact that BIW provides mostly high-paying civilian jobs, this will likely have an even stronger impact on the regional labor market than will the closure of BNAS.
- Trends in the Portland employment market have a strong effect on both housing and retail development in Topsham, as Topsham has become increasingly attractive to those who cannot afford higher home prices in places like Yarmouth and Freeport.
- Topsham is located in the center of the growing corridor between Portland and Augusta and its highway interchanges is one of very few along this corridor with potential for large-scale commercial and industrial development.

### 2. Housing Market

- Over the past year the single-family housing market in Topsham has been softening. There were about five times as many units on the market in September 2005 as there were at the same time in 2004. The average time on the market for homes has increased from less than 30 days to about 90 days since 2004 as well.
- Topsham has only been seeing 50-60 new housing units per year, much of which has been in the Highlands. Demand from retirees and late-career professional for units in the Highlands remains strong.
- Housing prices in Topsham have been appreciating 10-15% per year since 2000, but there is likely to be a correction in the next year or two. However, real estate professionals are generally positive about longer-term prospects for value increases.
- Single-family units in the village area and surrounding neighborhoods are selling for about \$160,000-200,000 depending on condition.
- Demand for multi-family buildings is strong. Better quality buildings are selling for as much as \$100,000 per unit. Older buildings needing some work are selling for considerably less—as low as \$50,000 per unit.
- Topsham is beginning to use its unique characteristics to carve out a niche in the regional residential market. The Town is located about halfway between Portland and Augusta and is emerging as a major regional retail and service center. For this reason, it is attractive to two-income families with one person commuting to Portland or Augusta and the other working retail or service jobs. The new Mallett Woods cluster townhome development is specifically targeting this demographic.

### 3. Retail Market

- The large-scale development occurring in the Topsham Fair Mall area will bring in national and regional retailers that can outbid local retailers. Topsham Fair Mall's large spaces are renting for \$20/SF and small spaces are going for as much as \$25. By comparison, retail rents in Brunswick's fully-leased Tontine Mall are around \$16.

- In addition to the development at Topsham Fair Mall, there are several other active retail development proposals that could result in several hundred thousand more square feet in the coming years. There are rising concerns that Topsham and the Mid-coast region are approaching retail saturation.
- There are few available retail spaces in the Topsham village area. Those that are available rent for \$15/SF or less. If more space were available in the village area, tenants who are being priced out of the Mall area and who cannot find space in Brunswick would certainly consider them.
- Automotive dealerships are adamant that they be located in high-visibility, high-traffic locations that offer direct access to and from major roadways. Also, all three existing auto dealers on Main Street are very happy with their present locations.
- Owners of some existing retail businesses feel that Town policies offer incentives to new retail businesses along Route 196 while unfairly punishing older businesses on Main Street.
- Many Main Street retail businesses are unhappy with both the flow of traffic and the pedestrian environment. Key trouble spots cited are at Winter Street (used as a cut-through to the Mall), Elm Street and Can-Am Drive (before and after school).
- Lower Village store owners are supportive of shared parking arrangements, as they feel it is good both for businesses and for the area's character.

#### 4. Office/Industrial Market

- Developers are seeing strong demand for small-scale professional office uses in Topsham village over next five years. Many small users in Brunswick are growing frustrated with the limitations of their older buildings and the lack of parking and are turning to Topsham as an alternative.
- The new Border Place office building, which will be completed in 2006, is offering Executive Suite space for small professional office users, complete with administrative support, conference facilities and office machinery for a gross rental rate of \$14/SF. Similar space in Portland rents for about \$18.
- The Fore River Company is constructing a 36,000 SF speculative office building at the Bowdoin Mill complex and is confident that a variety of tenants will quickly fill the building.

This building's proximity to the planned riverfront park will be a major asset.

- Existing industrial businesses in and around the Main Street corridor remain viable and are not likely to outgrow their sites in the near future.
- Industrial business owners are concerned about their ability to continue to operate as continued residential, retail and civic development occurs around them and pressure mounts from the community to relocate them.
- Industrial business owners are concerned about traffic along Route 196 and are hopeful that alternative roads and routes will be developed to allow their trucks to move freely.

## **Summary**

The section is structured around the following five key issues that were identified during the inventory and analysis process:

1. The Village presents an opportunity to enhance Topsham's overall attractiveness as a community center.
2. The closing of BNAS will have both mixed effects on Topsham's village area.
3. Lower and Middle villages both have potential for pedestrian-scale development and niche housing and commercial developments.
4. Upper Village can accommodate larger scale and automobile oriented development, but many current landowners are wary of change.
5. Change in the Village Area will be incremental and cannot occur overnight.

### **Issue #1 – Village as Means of Building Town's Image**

Commercial corridors are the windows through which communities are viewed. Most people who do not live or work in Topsham know the Town primarily from driving down Route 196. Thus, when many people think of Topsham, they think of a highway interchange and suburban-scaled retail, commercial and industrial developments. To most people outside of Topsham, the Main Street village area is thought of as little more than a small

strip of older homes, offices and shops. It is clearly not seen as a downtown in the mold of Brunswick or Bath.

As the Town of Topsham continues to transition from a bedroom community into a regional service center, the Town's historic center needs to take center stage. Today, when people and companies seek out places to live and do business, the character, aesthetics and other quality-of-life considerations are often as important as traditional economic development selling points like utility costs, the educational system and the labor force.

The good news is that Topsham's somewhat undefined village area presents an opportunity for the Town. Both through public investments in infrastructure and aesthetics and market-driven development, the village will be undergoing substantial change over the next few years. To build the village's identity, this change needs to occur with a strong emphasis on character and community.

### **Issue #2 – Mixed Effects of BNAS Closure**

The closure of Brunswick Naval Air Station is likely to be a mixed blessing for the Midcoast region, and Topsham in particular. The residential market is likely to experience a turbulent few years, with a short-term drop in demand for sale units and a spike in the demand for rental units expected as the base approaches its last days. To fulfill these varying needs, the region's housing market will need to remain flexible in the next five years.

Once the base is closed, there will be a great deal of turnover in the region's residential and commercial markets alike. There will also be some instability in the region's labor force as members of military families leave jobs and some retail and service jobs are likely to dry up. However, given the overall strong job growth trajectory of the Midcoast region, its long-term prospects look positive.

In terms of the effects on Topsham Village, the most obvious and immediate will be the conversion of the Annex from military housing to other uses. While the exact plans for the site are not

known, its location near the Mt. Ararat Middle and High Schools may make it an appropriate location for an educational institution of some sort. Concepts are already being discussed for the Annex, including a regional Innovation Center and a mixed-use development. Other ideas are likely to emerge as the planning process moves forward.

Apart from the Annex, there are opportunities for other sorts of development in Topsham Village as a result of BNAS' closure. It is expected that some late career military personnel will retire and remain in the area. This will have effects on both the housing market, as they look for off-base housing, and on the commercial market, as some are likely to start businesses in the area.

### **Issue #3 – Lower/Middle Village is Primarily for Niche Development**

The Lower and Middle Village portions of the study area are relatively compact and have few sites available for new development. However, the economics of this area are such that retail, office and residential space are somewhat more affordable than in Brunswick and far more affordable than in towns closer to Portland.

With more than 45,000 square feet of professional office space under construction in the Lower Village as of September 2005, there is not likely to be much demand for continued large-scale office development. However, as these spaces fill up, there will be needs for additional retail and service businesses to support the businesses and employees in Lower Village. There will also be demand for different types of housing in Lower and Middle Village, including upscale apartments, condominiums, and senior/assisted living.

A concern in this area is the potential conversion of older residential structures into retail and service businesses, particularly in Middle Village. Residents of the area and these new businesses have come into conflict over the size of commercial development, parking and access. The public outreach portion of this planning effort must focus on resolving these disputes.

Parking, traffic and the pedestrian environment are also concerns in Lower and Middle Villages. Storeowners want to see the Town do more to improve traffic flow and safety, particularly around the intersections of Main Street with Winter and Elm Streets. A perceived lack of enforcement of speeding and red-light violations must also be addressed.

#### **Issue #4 – Larger Scale Development in Upper Village Must Respect Existing Uses**

There is no doubt that many people in Topsham look at the Commercial Corridor and the Upper Village area as being wide-open for new development. And there is unquestionably strong market support for future residential, retail, business park and institutional uses in this area, particularly to the north of Route 196.

In considering the future of this portion of Topsham, the automotive dealers, repair shops, concrete plants and light-industrial businesses are often seen as impediments to the development of a true village. The fact remains that many of the owners of these businesses and properties have been in their present locations for a very long time. Without pressure from the public, these businesses are likely to remain where they are.

#### **Issue #5 – Change in Village Area Must be Incremental**

In 2005, Topsham finds itself in a very unique and difficult situation. Despite more than a decade of consistent growth and development, there are several external factors that impact the Town's short term prospects: the closure of BNAS, a softening residential real estate market, soaring gasoline prices and unclear plans of several large landowners. As it pursues development and redevelopment opportunities in its village area, the Town must therefore do so cautiously.

The Main Street Village Plan is being crafted to lay out a vision for 10 or more years of change. While there will definitely be many short-term recommendations that come out of the plan, the only guarantee about next two or three years is that they will be very unpredictable. It is therefore very important that change in the village area happen incrementally. By 2007 or 2008, much

more will be known about the Town, its economy and its future growth prospects. In the meantime, the Town will be best served by focusing on land use policies and ordinances and leaving major capital investments and large-scale interventions for another year.

# III. TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC CONDITIONS

## Main Street Traffic

### Overview

Traffic on Main Street is cited as the number one issue negatively impacting quality of life and pedestrian safety. Anyone trying to cross Main Street, making a left turn at an unsignalized location or trying to sleep at night can attest to the constant level and noise of traffic.

Besides refining the allowable land uses, zone lines and building and site performance standards, addressing traffic is the most significant issue for this study. Developing strategies for reducing and or minimizing traffic impacts and volume will be very difficult because Main Street is US Route 201 the entire length and State Route 24 from the Elm Street intersection south. There are specific laws governing the rerouting of traffic and the assignment of Route names. Knowing the absolute restrictions and looking within the boundaries of the standards for traffic minimizing standards will require the most creative thinking in the Main Street Village Plan.

### Traffic Volume

Approximately 19,000 cars use Main Street every day. This is in contrast to the approximately 26,000 cars using the Coastal Connector on a daily basis. This is without a doubt the most dominant “land use” in the Main Street Village.

From 7:00 AM to 8:00 AM, the AM peak hour, trucks account for 10% of the Main Street traffic and 10% of the 196 traffic. From 4:00 to 5:00 PM, the evening peak hour, trucks account for 4% of Main Street traffic and approximately 6% of 196 traffic.

When the Coast Connector opened in 1997, 24,500 cars passed through the lower village everyday. One year later the traffic

volume decreased to 14,000 vehicles. There is a projected growth rate of 0.5% for traffic on Main Street in the coming years. While the area around the 295 / 196 interchange was recently designated as an urban imperiled watershed by the MEDEP, it is assumed over time the 400 +/- acres in this area in addition to the redevelopment of the BNAS Annex and other Upper Village properties will only add to local traffic volumes. Main Street and 196 are also regional roads. As housing and development continues in outlying parts of town and adjacent communities, this will further add to traffic impacting Main Street.



*Truck and vehicular traffic dominate the visual character and “land use” on Main Street.*

Route 24 / Elm Street currently adds about 900 cars a day turning left to the Lower Village. The Route One south left turn off ramp is closed. It is hard to determine how much traffic is coming off the Coastal Connector at Bypass Drive and using Elm Street to access Maine Street in Brunswick. The assumption is that if the Route One southbound left turn lane on to Maine Street is reestablished that some traffic will be diverted from the Lower Village.

The August 23, 2005 Gorrill-Palmer Transportation Plan for Topsham includes recommendations for improvements to Main Street phased from 2005 through the year 2024. An overview of their recommendations is below.

### Signals, Crosswalks, Posted Speeds and other Control Mechanisms

Main Street currently serves as a conduit to move traffic in the most efficient manner. This is understandable given the current and projected traffic volumes, but for the sake of developing a more safe, healthy and sustainable Main Street, additional traffic control and calming measures are required.

As previously noted, there are three traffic lights along the entire length of Main Street. A flashing, non-pedestrian signal light is located at Canam Drive. The other two lights are located at the 196 and Elm Street intersections.

There are nine crosswalks the entire length of Main Street from the Frank Wood Bridge to 295. Two pedestrian signals are located at the 196 intersection on the southern and eastern legs. One pedestrian signal is located on the eastern leg of the Elm Street intersection.

The remaining seven crosswalks do not include pedestrian signals. The planned realignment of Monument Place with the trail system will not have either a traffic signal or a pedestrian signal. As a future critical Main Street and town wide pedestrian connection (compared to the pedestrian signal on the southern leg of the 196 intersection leading to the western bound sidewalk on the southern side of 196), a sidewalk and upgraded pedestrian treatments should be placed at this crossing.

The location of the nine crosswalks:

1. The southern entrance to the Bowdoin Mill
2. Summer Street intersection
3. Green Street intersection
4. Thompsons Lane intersection

5. Elm Street intersection
6. Wilson Drive intersection
7. 196 intersection
8. Eagles Way intersection (leads nowhere)
9. Forest Drive intersection



*Eagles Way / Main Street crosswalk with no connection to sidewalks on the western side.*

There are a total of eight left turn lanes the entire length of Main Street. Heading south the left turn lanes are located at Canam Drive, 196, the Post Office / Wright Pierce, Pleasant Street and Elm Street. Heading north the left turn lanes are located at Elm Street, Wilson Street, Monument Place and 196. The only signalized left turns are located at the Elm Street, Winter Street and 196 intersections.

North and south left turn lanes at Summer Street have been noted as a priority, and the need for this work will be monitored as development continues in the Lower Village. This intersection does not currently meet warrants for a traffic signal, but ongoing monitoring is recommended, particularly in light of the continued

build out of the Bowdoin Mill complex and the pedestrian/vehicular access to the remote parking.

The posted speeds for Main Street are 30 mph north of 196 and 25 mph south of 196. There is the possibility that the 30 mph posted speed could be lowered as part of an overall traffic-calming plan for Main Street.

Another mechanism for calming traffic is the limited number of onstreet parking spaces in the Lower Village. Cars parked in these spots in theory act as a calming measure by heightening the awareness of passing drivers, and giving the appearance of a more constrained street width.

Finally, during peak hours, the sheer volume of vehicles causes long queuing at lights and crosswalks and this delay consequently calms traffic.

In summary, there are six mechanisms currently in place to control traffic:

1. Three traffic signals (one flashing only)
2. Nine crosswalks
3. Nine left turn lanes
4. Posted speeds
5. Limited onstreet parking in the Lower Village
6. Peak hour volumes slows traffic movement

### **High Crash Locations and Intersection Level of Service**

The Summer Street and the 196 intersection are the only MaineDOT classified high crash locations on Main Street. Level of Service refers to the capacity of an intersection to handle traffic based on criteria for length of wait. Intersections are graded A-F like academic work, with a D being the typical minimum threshold for operations. An “F” at a signalized intersection means that a vehicle is delayed on average more than 80 seconds by the traffic signal. Gorrill-Palmer prepared forecasts for a number of intersections on Main Street for 2009:

Route One South bound off-ramp: F

Summer Street: F  
Winter Street: F  
Elm Street: E  
Monument Place: F  
196: D  
Eagles Way: F  
Canam Drive: F

The unsignalized level of service noted above applies to traffic turning from the minor street onto Main Street, with Main Street flowing freely. The signalized intersection level of service reflects the overall average delay for all vehicles entering the intersection.

In summary, of the eight Main Street intersections studied, seven have movements that experience long delays, and 196 is at “D”. It should be noted that Gorrill-Palmer recently completed a traffic impact analysis for the proposed Town Hall complex and a MaineDOT Traffic Movement Permit is not required. A traffic light at Monument Place is not required.

It should also be noted that the Monument Place Extension or parallel road was constructed because the build out of the Topsham Fair Mall could not occur without this relief along Route 196. The parallel road will aid local traffic and provides an alternative for 196 right and left turns at the Hamilton Court intersection and a right turn at the new 196 alignment opposite Union Park Drive, minimizing the number of cars turning left from the Monument Place extension onto Main Street.

### **Road Alignment, Village Form and Character**

Main Street in Topsham is basically a straight line without noticeable alignment or grade changes to break up the “tunnel” effect and allow for focal points such as landscapes, buildings or panoramic views. Most of Main Street is also flat, which does not create inherent visual diversity and changes in scale.

The alignment of Main Street in the Lower Village, as well as the change in grade, contributes to the dynamic quality of Main Street. When stopped at the Elm Street Intersection, one looks south to a curving wall of buildings with the Finest Kind at the

focal point (and the Bowdoin Mill beyond.) One is also looking down over the Lower Village. This enhances the visual experience and sense of place. Driving north on Main Street from the Lower Village, the buildings rise on a curve culminating in the church steeple at the Elm Street intersection. This visual drama is part of the underlying character giving the Lower Village such appeal.



*The view south to the Lower Village is enhanced by the curve in the road and building wall and the visual terminus of the Finest Kind site.*

Any redevelopment of the Finest Kind site should address the importance of this site as a visual focal point. The building should have a distinct character, such as a tower, reinforcing the view.



*The view north from the Lower Village is enhanced by the curve of the road and buildings and the change in grade culminating in the church steeple as a visual focal point.*

In developing the Main Street Village Plan, any focal points in the Middle, Commercial Corridor and Upper Village zones should be identified as the location of new buildings creating visual rhythm and change in scale as one approaches and passes the building. For example, the realigned Monument Place terminates with a view of the post office, which is a very important civic land use, but the current architecture does nothing to define the intersection and take advantage of the visual importance of the site.



*The post office is a very important land use on Main Street. Any redesign should recognize its location as a visual terminus of the realigned Monument Place.*

The post office should have a stronger presence. If the post office relocates, the new building on this site should be designed to better define this important crossroads. The proposed Town Hall, the realigned Monument place, the post office and the town-wide trail system converge at this point. The design of the buildings and the streetscape should emphasize this spot is an important civic node and gateway on Main Street.

This crossroads is also close to the 196 / Main Street intersection. A key gateway to Main Street can be established for people arriving via 196 or Monument Place at this location by creating a legible sense of place through architecture and streetscape design.

#### **Noted Deficiencies (from Gorrill-Palmer Plan)**

Deficiencies currently exist in the Lower Village and in portions of the Upper Village. These deficiencies include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The intersection of Route 196 and Main Street currently operates at low levels of service, creating significant queuing and delay.
- A great deal of congestion and queuing occurs in the Lower Village, as Main Street consists of a single lane in each direction with no turning lanes.
- Vehicles waiting to turn left onto Winter Street, Summer Street, and the Bowdoin Mill often block traffic causing long queues that extend through adjacent intersections, further worsening the levels of service at surrounding intersections.
- The majority of the movements at all intersections within the Lower Village are anticipated to operate at level of service 'F' during the 2024 design year under existing conditions.
- Traffic exiting Eagles Way and CanAm Drive onto Route 201 is anticipated to experience significant delay during the 2009 and 2024 design years under existing conditions.

#### **Proposed Traffic Improvements to aid the Lower Village (from Gorrill-Palmer Plan)**

##### **2005-2006:**

- Make Thompson's Lane one-way toward Green Street.

##### **2006-2007:**

- Reconstruct Elm Street Extension to allow two-way traffic and make Elm Street/Main Street intersection a true four-way intersection.
- Eliminate left turns from Main Street northbound onto Winter Street, moving left turns to the signal at Elm Street/Elm Street Extension. Make Winter Street Spur one-way towards Main Street from the entrance to the Picture Framer parking lot. Add parking spaces on the northern side on Winter Street Spur along the one-way section.
- Reinstate left turn from Rte 1 SB off-ramp onto Maine Street in Brunswick.

- Brunswick and signalize the intersection of Maine Street and the Rte 1 SB off-ramp. Prohibit right turns on red from ramp to provide gaps in traffic flow into Lower Village. Install a sign on Route 1 indicating that Route 201 can be accessed from the Coastal Connector.
- Add pedestrian crosswalk from the southern entrance of Bowdoin Mill across Main Street to the sidewalk leading to the Frank Wood Bridge.

**Ongoing:**

- Determine if warrants are met for a traffic signal at Bowdoin Mill and Summer Street. When met, add traffic light and left turn bays on Main Street at Summer Street and Bowdoin Mill. Lights will include pedestrian phase.
- Work with the MaineDOT to redesignate Route 24 to extend from Middlesex Road to Bypass Drive to Route 196 to Route 1 and reconnect with the existing Route 24 at Cook's Corner. This would redirect traffic from Elm Street, Main Street, Maine Street (Brunswick) and Bath Road that wants to go to Harpswell.

**2009 Upper Village**

Recommendations in the section of Topsham north of the Lower Village include the following:

**2005-2006:**

- Construct a connector road from Monument Place to Topsham Fair Mall Road (to be called Monument Place Extension) with connections to Hamilton Court and Mallett Drive. As part of this improvement, the intersection of Monument Place with Route 196 will be realigned and left turns out of Monument Place will be prohibited. The left turns into Monument Place and Union Park Drive from Route 196 should be monitored and prohibited if they raise a safety concern. In addition, improvements would be made to the intersection of Monument Place and Main Street including separate left and right turn lanes exiting Monument Place and extension of the northbound left turn lane from Main Street onto Monument Place. This intersection should be monitored for installation of a traffic signal to be coordinated with the signal at Route 196.

- Lengthen the northbound left turn lane on Main Street at Route 196.
- Redesignate the center left turn lane as a through lane.
- Modify the median on Route 196 to allow for a longer left turn pocket for traffic heading north on Route 201. Monitor for a possible second left turn lane (eastbound) on Route 196 for traffic heading north on Route 201.

**2006-2007:**

- Improve pedestrian crossing safety at the Route 196/Route 201 intersection.
- Construct necessary improvements on Main Street in the vicinity of the new Town Office and Public Safety site (planned for the southwest corner of Main Street at Monument Place).

**2007:**

- Accept CanAm Drive from Republic Drive to Mountain Road as a public way.
- Make Eagles Way one-way towards Mt. Ararat High School.
- Signalize the intersection of CanAm Drive and Main Street.

**2008-2009:**

- Widen Route 196 (Coastal Connector) to four lanes from Bypass Drive to Main Street.

**Town Onstreet Parking Restrictions**

Chapter 210 of the Town Code specifies areas for onstreet parking in the Main Street Village area and the zone of influence:

A.

Elm Street. There shall be no parking of vehicles on Elm Street in any of the following locations.

(1)

On either side from the intersection of Main Street and Elm Street to the intersection of Pleasant Street and Elm Street. Vehicles parked alongside Elm Street in this one (1) area and not within the traveled portion on Sunday for church services are exempt.

- (2)  
On the north side:
  - (a)  
From the intersection of Pleasant Street and Elm Street to the intersection of the main entrance to the Topsham Fairgrounds and Elm Street.
  - (b)  
From the intersection at Fair Circle to the intersection of Foreside Road and Elm Street.
- (3)  
On the south side of 63 Elm Street (Fields Spar Mill) to the railroad overhead bridge.
- B.  
Main Street. There shall be no parking of vehicles on either side of Main Street from the intersection of Elm Street and Main Streets to the intersection of Route 196 and Main Street (to the post office on the east side of Main Street).
  - (1)  
There shall be no parking of vehicles on the west side of Main Street from the intersection of Main Street and Summer Streets to the intersection of Main and Elm Street.
  - (2)  
Parking will be allowed on the east side of Main Street between the Frank Woods Bridge and the intersection of Green Street in the marked spaces for a maximum of two consecutive hours. **[Amended 2-5-2004 by the Board of Selectmen]**
  - (3)  
There shall be no parking of vehicles on the east or west side of Main Street from the intersection of Elm and Main Street in a northerly direction for a distance of 600 feet.
  - (4)  
Parking will be allowed in the identified spaces on Ron's Way at the intersection of Main Street and Green Street for a maximum of two consecutive hours. **[Added 2-5-2004 by the Board of Selectmen]**
- C.  
Perkins Street. There shall be no parking of vehicles on either side of the short portion of Perkins Street from the intersection of Pleasant and Perkins Street to the portion of Perkins Street that runs north and south.
- D.

- Winter Street.
  - (1)  
There shall be no parking of vehicles along either side of Winter Street from Garden Drive to the Central Maine Power Company pole No. 1.
  - (2)  
There shall be no parking of vehicles on the south side of Winter Street for a distance of 75 feet from the intersection of Main and Winter Street.
- E.  
There shall be no parking from the west line of Main Street to a point fifty (50) feet west of the intersection, except that a loading zone shall be permitted on the southerly side of Winter Street within twenty (20) feet of the intersection.
- F.  
There shall be no parking permitted on the northeast side of Route 196 from the intersection of Route 201 to the intersection at Second Street.
- G.  
Second Street.
  - (1)  
There shall be no parking permitted on the north side of Second Street.
  - (2)  
Parking shall be permitted on the south side of Second Street for one (1) hour from a point of approximately fifty (50) feet from the intersection of Route 196 proceeding easterly for a distance of approximately one hundred (100) feet.
- H.  
There shall be no parking permitted on School Drive from the intersection of Perkins Street to the intersection with the Williams - Cone School parking lot.
- I.  
There shall be no parking permitted on the final one hundred (100) yards of the section of Old Augusta Road that enters Route 201 north of the interstate. This includes both sides of the road and the turnaround located near the dead end.
- J.  
No parking shall be permitted in the area marked "Fire Lane" except for Fire Department apparatus.

K.  
There shall be no parking on either side of Green Street.

L.  
There shall be no parking of vehicles on either side of Pleasant Street. Parking is allowed in the three designated parking spaces on the west side in front of the library.

M.  
There shall be no parking of vehicles on either side of Wilson Street.

N.  
There shall be no parking of vehicles on the north side of Melcher Place.

O.  
There shall be no parking of vehicles on Frost Street.

### **Route Numbering and Traffic Mitigation (paraphrased from MaineDOT correspondence)**

The main question to ask here is whether the route numbering is affecting the local traffic volumes. In other words, how much of the traffic is following the route numbers as through travelers vs. how much of it is local traffic that is there regardless of the route numbering. The majority of traffic is not on Main Street because of the route numbers. Therefore, any change in route numbering will have minor affect on ADT and even smaller effect on AADT.

Specific to US Rt 201. The southerly terminus of this US Route number is at the Rt 1 crossover bridge in Brunswick and it heads north from there. It would be possible to move this over onto the Connector and terminate it at Rt 1. However, this makes the routed path to Rt 1 even longer than it is now and that is contrary to numbering protocol, which provides the shortest most direct path between two points. Plus, there would be no route number for Main Street in Topsham.

This would have to have the support of both Topsham and Brunswick officials and would not have strong support from MaineDOT. Without support from all 3, it would not be sent along to AAHSTO for consideration.

Specific to State Rt 24, the process is simpler as all it needs is support from both Topsham and Brunswick officials, the public, and MaineDOT. The change could happen quite quickly.

In reviewing this idea, it may reduce traffic on Maine Street in Brunswick and the southerly end of Main Street in Topsham. However, seeing that the AADT on Rt 24 south from Bowdoinham is only a few thousand vehicles, it appears the net effect on volumes would again be rather small because most of the in town traffic is due to "local knowledge" and not through travelers following a route number. While putting Rt 24 across the Connector may shorten its overall length and be more direct, it would have to follow Rt 1 to Cooks Corner and then reconnect to 24. This would remove any route numbering from Elm Street in Topsham and also Main Street and Bath Road in Brunswick to Cooks Corner. This probably is not advisable. One option that could be considered is to have a Rt "24 Business" loop off Rt 24 following this path through downtown Brunswick out to Cooks Corner, however, that is not strongly recommended by MaineDOT. Plus, if the ultimate goal is to reduce traffic volumes through changes in route numbers, a "24B" would not be very beneficial.

There would most likely not be significant change in volumes from either route numbering change because the volumes are not due to through travelers following either 24 or 201. As far as "process" goes, strong support from both Topsham and Brunswick officials is critical, including support of the residents and businesses along these routes depending on these numbers. A public hearing and comment period would be necessary. However, before undertaking this task, both towns would have to provide convincing arguments to MaineDOT to justify these ideas and present solutions to the concerns mentioned above. Just let us know how you want to pursue this.

Minimizing traffic is probably not going to be achieved through route number changes but more on limiting entrance permits and building permits and development along or near these in town routes.

## Summary

- 19,000 cars use Main Street everyday. Vehicular traffic is the most negative and dangerous aspect of Main Street.
- 26,000 vehicles use the Coastal Connector. The 196 intersection was unanimously noted as the most negative aspect of Main Street during the three public forums.
- 24,500 cars used Main Street daily when the Coastal Connector opened in 1997. In 1998 the volume of Main Street traffic dropped to 14,000 cars daily. At a minimum, an average annual traffic increase forecast for Main Street traffic volume is 0.5%.
- There are three traffic lights on Main Street.
- There are nine crosswalks on Main Street.
- There are nine left turn lanes on Main Street.
- The 196 and Summer Street intersections are the only two MaineDOT identified high crash locations.
- Most Main Street intersections are currently experiencing long delays for minor street traffic entering onto Main Street.
- Gorrill-Palmer completed a Topsham Transportation Plan in 2005 with a wide range of phased improvements benefiting cars and pedestrians on Main Street.
- Main Street is Federal Route 201 the entire length and State Route 24 from Elm Street south. Initial conversations with MaineDOT suggest that reassigning the Routes off Main Street may be difficult. Even if Route numbers were relocated, there is no solid evidence that traffic volumes will decrease.
- Sidewalks are needed on the western side of Main Street.
- While the volume of traffic on Main Street may not be reduced, traffic calming measure can be created, mitigating traffic, creating a safer pedestrian environment and possibly deterring people from driving Main Street.
- Main Street should be understood as an “outdoor” room defined by buildings and streetscape elements. Main Street in the Lower and Middle Village feels less visually dominant than in other zones because of the close proximity of buildings and mature trees.