Rural Character in the Hilltowns: Understanding Attitudes About Planning in the Context of Attachment to Place

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RURAL CHARACTER IN THE HILLTOWNS:
UNDERSTANDING ATTITUDES ABOUT PLANNING IN THE CONTEXT OF 
ATTACHMENT TO PLACE

A Thesis Presented
by
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DEDICATION

To my mother and father for being my first and greatest teachers.

To R.D. for your enduring support, and for always believing I would get there.
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Several more warm and amazing people, near and far, have been instrumental to my completion of this work in ways they might never suspect. Each and every gesture of support has made a difference; I won’t forget.
This research examines the perceptions and attitudes of residents in five rural communities located in the Hilltowns of Western Massachusetts: Ashfield, Chesterfield, Conway, Goshen, and Williamsburg. The research aims to explore the divide between local residents’ strongly held support for private property rights and a concomitant desire to maintain the qualities that contribute to the social, ecological, and aesthetic experience of a rural town, including a viable farm and forest economy. Previous research in the same project utilized mailed, written surveys. In this case, in-depth, in-person interviews were conducted with ten residents of the study area in order to complement the breadth of information gleaned from these earlier studies.

The research goal was to inform planning efforts that strive to balance the preservation of rural character with growth and change. Questions were asked to ascertain the individual’s connection to the rural community, including length of residency, occupation, and other demographic variables. Further questions were posed to learn how participants felt that landowner rights to develop property and government intervention to preserve land could be effectively balanced.

Results showed that landowners’ desire to retain their property rights remains in conflict with their wish to see their communities remain rural in the face of new development. Medium-term
residents may be the most motivated group to get involved in ways to balance landscape change and development with a need to preserve town character. According to study participants, local governments should focus their efforts on voluntary, cooperative measures. Such measures should ideally minimize bureaucracy and maximize a multi-jurisdictional approach in considering a variety of techniques to resolve tough land-use conflicts. Local land trusts emerged as the best-positioned entity to forge cooperative ventures with farmers, landowners, and others in protecting the places of greatest value to those who live and work in the rural landscape. The need for education and communication was vitally expressed. This study sheds new light on the different nuanced and sometimes conflicting attitudes about preserving the rural landscape, but also offers hope for solutions based on collaborations between local governments, land trusts, and local residents.
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Winding country roads, soft winter landscapes, smoky chimneys, and dramatic vistas of late-season foliage; the rural landscape of New England is one of its greatest assets, both for the quality of life enjoyed by those who call it home and for the economic boost it brings to a flourishing tourism industry. Photography, artwork, film, and the written word are a few of the means by which people throughout the world can connect to this region, whether they’ve ever been able to visit in person or not. While some parts of New England are more abundant in this cultural and ecological resource than others, it stands to reason that the entire region benefits from the image of a rustic landscape and its concurrent reality.

Massachusetts is unique among the six New England states because of its dense population relative not only to its neighbors but also to the country at large, ranking third in density of all the states with 6.1 million people living across its 5 million acres (Center for Rural Massachusetts 2005). Yet Massachusetts is the only state in the nation to lose its estimated population for two consecutive years between 2003 and 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b). Despite this apparent trend of population loss, the state cannot afford to underestimate the challenges of maintaining its rural resources in the face of such an extreme ratio of people to land. Massachusetts claims eighth place nationally in percentage of forest cover with its 3.1 million acres of forested land (Center for Rural Massachusetts 2005). While it might appear that a balance has been struck between the people and natural resources of Massachusetts, in reality these figures translate to a threatened tapestry of forests that is increasingly losing connectivity as the demand for new homes in spacious rural settings continues to rise.

While governments, planning organizations, and nonprofits partner in efforts to direct development outside of the most critical and valuable landscapes across the state, many private
landowners have voluntarily joined in this collaboration in the interest of safeguarding some of their own land for habitat or scenic purposes, or to otherwise preserve it for future generations. It is clearly not only those working in the planning and natural resource professions who place a high premium on the rural landscape as it now exists. However, regulations that have prohibited landowners from certain uses on their land have generated a backlash against the preservation impulse, dividing people bitterly over questions of environmental and social values (i.e., the “greater good”) versus personal property rights in which the freedom of landowners to utilize their property as they see fit is seen as a legal and cultural given (Daily Hampshire Gazette 2005).

**Research Extent**

This research attempts to identify how strength of personal attachment to the land may reveal the inherent value that local residents place on the rural landscape. This value may help to predict the likelihood that residents are willing to trade ownership rights to ensure the longevity and health of the land in their communities. Strength of attachment to the land may coincide with certain attitudes regarding individual vs. government control over what happens on personal property. The value of the rural landscape in terms of personal attachment can better be defined by understanding what places people are most drawn to and why. By uncovering some of the impulses that drive people to live, recreate, or work in the countryside, perhaps this research can suggest the utilization of land preservation techniques in a manner consistent with the desires and perceptions of the people who live in a particular locale. Thus, personal connection to the rural landscape will be addressed here through an inquiry of place attachment, landscape preference, and the potential restorative value of landscapes to the people living therein.

Hand in hand with this assessment, this research intends to look at perceptions that rural residents have regarding land controls and regulations. Both mandatory and voluntary strategies employed by local and state government will be addressed to better understand the gradient that characterizes rural attitudes toward varying degrees of government intervention. Together with the information gleaned above, it is hoped that conclusions can be drawn regarding attachment to the land and willingness to partner with local officials and organizations in preserving that same land.

This study focuses on a five-town area in Western Massachusetts in an attempt to uncover issues that may be specific to the area and/or applicable at the state or broader levels. The chosen
study area is pertinent for its rural character, proximity to a burgeoning population that is increasingly moving into and changing the rural landscape, and for the diversity within the five towns themselves in topography, historic settlement patterns, and varying ease of access from nearby population centers. A detailed description of the study area is provided in Chapter III.

**Research Approach**

To better inform this study, the current state of research will be reviewed to summarize prevailing theories on rural character and its future challenges. Research on preferences for and attachment to place will be presented, as well as an overview of restorative or health-promoting aspects of landscapes. In addition, existing literature on land preservation techniques, both enforced and voluntary, will be reviewed and summarized.

Following the literature review, a description of the project and an overview of methodological alternatives will be presented, including a rationale for the chosen survey instrument: semistructured in-depth interviews. These interviews will be carried out in order to collect qualitative data on the attachment local residents have to their landscape and community as well as attitudes they have towards local planning efforts. The results of these interviews will be analyzed and a discussion and conclusion will follow.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rurality of small town landscapes, both working and scenic, is becoming increasingly eroded by current patterns of rising in-migration (Center for Rural Massachusetts 2005; Ryan 2006; Heart et al. 2002; Donahue 1999; Daniels 1997; Daniels and Bowers 1997; Babize and Cudnohufsky n.d.). Population pressures in turn foster rapid large lot development, unprecedented rural land-use conflicts, and fragmentation of ecological and agricultural networks (Center for Rural Massachusetts 2005; Ryan 2006; Heart et al. 2002; Donahue 1999; Daniels 1997; Daniels and Bowers 1997; Babize and Cudnohufsky n.d.). In addition to delving into how rural character may be disintegrating, this research will also consider the layperson’s definition and images associated with the concept of ‘rural’. Recent literature on these issues is presented below with the intention of defining rural identity and its threats, as well as bolstering the suggestion that effective land-use management may increasingly depend on the ability to accurately assess the receptivity of rural residents to a variety of land preservation tools and techniques.

The current literature is mixed on how the values people express about place relate to their feelings toward land-use controls and regulations. A review of salient research on how people perceive place, specifically the rural landscape, is followed by a discussion of what voluntary and mandatory land preservation tactics are available, and how they are commonly received by the rural public.

The review of the state of research on landscape perception will simultaneously reflect and expand upon the review of literature undertaken in the previous two studies in this series, namely Walker (2003) and Lokocz (2005). In Walker’s research, the concepts of landscape preference and place attachment were comprehensively surveyed and tied into her research on the orchard landscape as a distinctive and threatened rural resource in the setting of Monmouth, Maine. Lokocz (2005)
continued the review of literature on preference and attachment research, applying the principles to a survey study of Conway, a rural town in Western Massachusetts that is also part of the present study. This current research will draw upon key points from these earlier reviews and incorporate a review on literature that addresses the concept of restorative landscapes. It is hoped that understanding the connection between health and environment will help to deepen as well as broaden a current understanding of the implications of attachment between people and place.

**Rural Character and Change**

“America is farming on the edge. . . . Every state in the nation is sacrificing irreplaceable agricultural resources to urban sprawl. We are converting a total of about 1 million acres a year.”

- American Farmland Trust 1997, 3

**Understanding Rural Change**

With these opening words from *Saving American Farmland: What Works*, the American Farmland Trust (1997) clearly denotes the threat to rural working landscapes all across the country. More recent figures by the American Farmland Trust (2004) indicate that in Massachusetts alone over 40 acres of farmland are converted to development every day.

While these conversion statistics illustrate a grave trend for agriculture, rural lands as a whole across the nation are being developed at approximately double the rate of farmland. From 1992 to 2002, newly developed lands topped roughly 20 million acres, according to the 2004 National Resources Inventory of the United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Services (USDA NRCS). This represents a greater than 50% rate increase from the previous decade that saw 13 million acres converted to development (United States Department of Agriculture 2004). If this trend is borne out in the present decade, the United States may already be experiencing a loss of ecological, scenic, and working landscapes in the realm of 3 million acres this year alone.

In describing the role of the landscape architect in the rural landscape, Coen, Nassauer, and Tuttle (1987) suggested that rural change can arrive quietly and yet suddenly, in both obvious and insidious ways. Rural land-use changes as they have been occurring have replaced productive farmland with development and pitted farmer against new homeowner due to incompatibility of
land-use needs. Coen, Nassauer, and Tuttle (1987) go on to suggest that the farmer has increasingly become a social and political minority, with diminishing incentive to maintain farm-related activities over the long term.

The effects of change in agricultural management techniques over time have also impacted the landscape and contributed to the loss of ecological stability (Coen, Nassauer, and Tuttle 1987). Worldwide, the decrease in agricultural sustainability has raised serious concern about resources on a global scale. Coen, Nassauer, and Tuttle (1987) credit the Worldwatch Institute’s Lester Brown with stating in 1985 that present resource degradation through food production has gone so far as to be akin to drawing on the principal in a bank account rather than its interest. In a later press release for the 1996 World Food Summit, Brown warned “Although growth in the grain harvest is slowing, the world continues to add nearly 90 million people per year. If these additional 90 million cannot be fed from an expanded harvest, then they will be fed by reducing consumption among those already here” (1996, bottom of first page).

As an inevitable process, change can be allowed to happen in an undirected manner, or may be guided over time to uphold conditions that are palatable to society in light of damaging alternatives (Coen, Nassauer, and Tuttle 1987). To guide this change, policymakers seek to implement regulations and incentives that will channel market forces to the places where development is desired. The sections on planning strategies later in this chapter explore some “carrot and stick” methods of policy implementation.

Defining Rural Character

In 1995 a research study was undertaken by Keith Halfacree in rural England to elicit associations that small-town residents attribute to the term ‘rural’ and build a case for the social representation of rurality. The particular inquiries and responses discussed here have particular relevance to the problem of defining rurality for the purposes of the present study.

Halfacree’s (1995) study questioned whether the respondent considered his or her region to be ‘rural’ or ‘urban’, followed by a probe into what features of the area made the place that way. Following up on the overwhelming response of ‘rural’ to the first question, responses to the second question were grouped into a series of categories that included contextual (i.e. ‘surrounded by fields’), population size or density, environmental, occupational, locational, and social, among others. This
begins to define the way that rural residents may self-conceptualize their home region in the absence of prompting by the interviewer.

Reversing tactics, subjects were provided with eight dimensions of rurality via polarized pairs of characteristics such as Relaxation/Stress, Tradition/Modernity, Healthiness/Unhealthiness, etc. The opportunity for the subjects to define rurality on each continuum in their own words allowed for a great depth and range of responses. For instance, in response to Halfacree’s (1995) question, “Do you associate with rural areas either stress or relaxation?” nobody responded that rural areas were entirely associated with stress, although a few responded ‘both’. People did report some feelings of stress if they were elderly, immobile, or without local family ties. Farmers reported stress related to financial and other occupational concerns. Traffic and car-related issues came up, such as car dependency, and social stresses were mentioned relating to family, neighbors, and involvement in community events.

Halfacree’s (1995) research into the perception of rural character offers an opportunity for comparison in this current study, to see if further open-ended queries into the concept of rurality may either strengthen or contradict the categories of responses that emerged in Halfacree’s study. It will be of interest as well to compare similar questions on associations of stress or relaxation with rural community living.

**Perceptions of the Rural Landscape**

**Landscape Preference**

As noted by both Walker (2003) and Lokocz (2005), research into preference for certain landscapes over others and the underlying motivations that spur this preference has traditionally been the purview of environmental psychology, with growing recognition of its applicability to planning and design. The measurable preference for one landscape scene over another is based in the human need to understand one’s environment and a concurrent desire to be drawn in to explore it (Kaplan, Kaplan, and Ryan 1998).

Research undertaken by Zube, Pitt, and Anderson (1975) examined four categories of assumptions that had traditionally been made regarding landscape preference yet had never been directly tested due lack of time or resources, or simply considered a foregone conclusion. One such
assumption correlated landscape preference with diversity of landscape pattern and relative elevation and another noted water as a universal landscape enhancer with only rare exceptions. Zube, Pitt, and Anderson (1975) also pointed to the assumption that man-made and wilderness landscapes hold equal potential to exhibit high scenic quality, as well as the likelihood that preferences of design and planning professionals accurately reflect those of the lay public. Study results bore out the validity of these assumptions with one exception: they did not show equal scenic potential across the continuum of built and natural environments (Zube, Pitt, and Anderson 1975).

To expand on theories of landscape preference, Kaplan, Kaplan, and Ryan (1998) constructed a preference matrix to explain four factors that govern a person’s draw to particular landscape scenes. The four factors are coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery. Each factor falls under either the category of Understanding or that of Exploration, and is a component of either two-dimensional or three-dimensional scenes (Kaplan, Kaplan, and Ryan 1998). While a photograph will only show a scene in two dimensions, the person viewing the scene has the capacity to imagine the scene in three dimensions and picture themselves within the scene as well. A scene that has sufficient levels of each of the four factors, whether visible or inferred, will rate high in preference in comparison to a scene that lacks one or more of these factors (Kaplan, Kaplan, and Ryan 1998).

In 2000, Brush, Chenoweth, and Barman conducted a study using video simulation to gather data about landscape preference (measured by enjoyability of the drive) along highway travel corridors in Wisconsin. The travel corridors fell into landscape categories of urban edge, farming, and forest, while controlling for variables of topographic diversity and presence of water features. Respondents fell into two broad categories, those who worked the land (including dairy farmers, logging contractors, and foresters) and those who were presumably attracted by rural amenities (including lake association officers and two tourist groups). Across all groups, forested landscapes rated the highest in scenic enjoyability with the exception of the dairy farming group who rated farming scenes the highest. Although urban edge conditions rated the lowest by all groups, farmers averaged a higher preference than all other groups. Farmers and logging contractors were underrepresented in this study despite greater recruitment efforts on their behalf (Brush, Chenoweth, and Barman 2000). Significant here is the apparent occupational bias in farmers’ ratings of farmland scenery as well as the apparent conflict between the farmers’ higher preference
for urban edge landscapes and the very threat these landscapes pose to the future of the farming industry (Brush, Chenoweth, and Barman 2000).

A 1996 study, conducted in rural Western Norway by Einar Strumse at the University of Bergen’s Research Center for Health Promotion, demonstrated a relationship between preference of agrarian landscapes and demographic variables such as age, gender, and expertise. Strumse (1996) identified some shortcomings of the study relating to sample representation, but overall the results indicated that traditional agrarian scenes, old structures, and flower and grass scenes were almost universally preferred. The latter would appear to indicate likelihood that such scenes evoke feelings of security and legibility (Strumse 1996). Results showed that the group representing ‘experts’ showed the lowest preference for open grassy areas, perhaps because this group is most likely to be trained in the fundamentals of ecology (Strumse 1996). Women overall showed the strongest preference for such scenes, for which Strumse (1996) suggested motivations stemming from either evolution or feelings of security. Modern technology and heavy-handed man-made elements generally rated lower for all groups, as did spruce plantations that may have appeared foreboding due to their particular height and lack of visibility (Strumse 1996). Interestingly, agricultural landscapes showed the greatest diversity of responses between demographic groups. In Strumse’s (1996) findings, older respondents, those with greater levels of expertise, and those who currently resided within rural settings all showed the strongest preference for farming landscapes.

Research on perceptions and values of rural residents conducted by Ryan (1998) also showed demographic variables as affecting perceptions of a river corridor in the Midwestern region of the United States. Between residential and farming subsets of the population, the residential respondents demonstrated a clear preference for river scenes over farm scenes, while those involved in agriculture showed a high preference for farming and other rural scenes, to an equal degree that they valued the river scenes. Length of residence also factored in critically, and Ryan’s (1998) results indicating that those who had lived in the region for the shortest amount of time typically held the highest value for the river corridor as compared to those who had resided in the area much longer. One interesting finding of this research was that shorter term residents showed preference for the natural amenities of the region while longer term residents appeared to place relatively equal value on developed and natural places (Ryan 1998).
Landscape preference appears then to be affected by both elements of the landscape itself and the demographics of the people who experience it. In considering features of the landscape, the above research indicates that people gravitate toward visually coherent and complex scenes that invite exploration, although may be overwhelmed by scenes that do not provide adequate visibility. Demographic considerations may include level of expertise or type of occupation, length of residency, and gender. Each of these factors has been shown to affect how people perceive and respond to the landscape.

**Place Attachment**

Contrasting with the relatively objective measurements that landscape preference studies permit, place attachment is better understood through a subjective lens (Walker 2003). Attachment to place can work concurrently on the evolutionary or biological level, the social or cultural level, and the individual level (Shumaker and Taylor 1983). According to Shumaker and Taylor (1983, 237), “Attachment itself, at the individual level, is a system of interlocked attitudes and behaviors that refer to the home and the household and reflect the intimacy of strength of the individual’s tie to that locale.”

Culturally, place attachment is intimately tied in with social and cultural forces, as well as the landscape that has been shaped by these forces (Shumaker and Taylor 1983). An ongoing cost-benefit analysis may underlie an individual’s strength of attachment to place, in which perceived alternatives are weighed against the relative level at which current physical and social needs are met (Shumaker and Taylor 1983). The idea of choice has its own particular significance, as it may not matter how well current needs are being met if the individual feels “stuck” and without alternatives to living in a given place (Shumaker and Taylor 1983). Satisfaction with place often correlates with the development of a deep connection with that place, but this is not always so (Shumaker and Taylor 1983). Some mitigating factors may be age, family status, mobility, and length of residence, although these factors themselves are also not necessarily predictive of formation of attachment to place (Shumaker and Taylor 1983).

Walker (2003) examined the level of preference people living in a rural Maine community held for different types of agricultural landscapes such as orchards and dairy farms. The results indicated that as a whole, agriculture was highly supported, with orchards also highly valued but not necessarily seen as part of the agricultural landscape. Walker (2003) found that those who reported
observing more changes in the landscape over time were more likely to show attachment to farmland and cultural features than those who did not. Longer term residents also showed a higher value for cultural scenes than shorter term residents, findings similar to the above discussion on landscape preference (Walker 2003).

Lokocz (2005) followed up on Walker’s (2003) research with a rural Massachusetts study that indicated a high level of attachment between residents and their surrounding landscapes. Particularly high across all demographics was a preference for natural elements of landscapes, such as water features, woods, and wildlife, and for agricultural scenes such as stone walls and open fields. Longer term residents expressed a higher preference than newer residents for cultural features such as village centers and churches (Lokocz 2005). Those raised in the community showed higher preference for open space and agriculture, but not for cultural features, while those raised elsewhere, even in nearby communities, did not show a relationship. Lokocz (2005) noted that the perception of change in the town over time did not affect either of these factors; rather, the length of residency and where the respondent grew up were better predictors.

Studies in place attachment and landscape preference share some of the demographic differences that affect perception of place. The ability to form deep attachments to the local landscape does appear to be affected by demographics such as length of residency, age, and place raised, but this may not consistently be the case. As shown in both discussions, many of the landscape features that characterize landscape preference also affect place attachment, particularly water features, natural or open landscapes, and agricultural views.

**Restorative Landscapes**

One component of this present inquiry is an attempt to tease out reflections of respondents on the value of the rural landscape as a restorative and health-promoting asset. Existing research on the health benefits of the landscape and related elements has delved into testing physical and mental responses to the environment, as well as measuring the perception of health benefits associated with landscape settings, often within the context of the landscape preference and place attachment studies previously discussed.
The effect that spaces filled with plants, trees, and “greenness” has on the physical and mental health of people is becoming increasingly understood and documented. Gerlach-Spriggs, Kaufman, and Warner (1998, 39) explain that:

Nature, uniquely and with singular rapidity and consistency, restores us to physiological and felt homeostasis. Edward O. Wilson’s Biophilia suggests that our ties to nature are in fact biologically based and part of our evolutionary heritage. For our purposes the biophilia hypothesis is important because it traces the roots of our response to nature, and hence gardens, back to the same evolutionary soil in which consciousness and culture evolved.

Evans and McCoy (1998) discuss the role of restorative design in architecture, which may promote health by lowering stress and fatigue, offering contemplative experiences, and by providing elements that induce involuntary, or relaxed, states of attention, to include views of moving water, trees, or fireplaces.

Several studies (Sheets and Manzer 1991; Parsons et al. 1998; Wells 2000) show how vegetation and trees increase preference for a particular place, as well as improve mood and reduce stress. Sheets and Manzer (1991) reported that the addition of trees along city streets produced a positive emotional response in their subjects, as well as an improved perception of “quality of life” in those settings. In a study that measured responses from simulations of drives through different scenes after exposure to stress, Parsons et al. (1998) determined that nature-dominated drives resulted in lower blood pressure, quicker recovery from stress, and greater immunization to further stress than artifact-dominated drives. A study by Wells (2000) indicates that when children move from a home with relatively little greenness to a place with higher amounts of greenness, they exhibit higher levels of cognitive functioning compared to children with little change between homes.

Such studies show how natural elements play a role in cognitive restoration and stress reduction, although they have primarily taken place in urban or suburban settings. In a rural setting where open landscape is dominant, the question remains as to how the effects of restoration would play out for those living within such an environment and whether such effects would necessarily be perceptible by these residents.
Conservation Strategies

A Case for Preserving New England Landscapes

“Massachusetts farms also provide more than good food and charming scenery. The state’s productive farms help to keep taxes low for all Bay Staters, since farmland requires less in services than development.”

- American Farmland Trust 2003, first page (not numbered)

Having looked at the literature on rural character and perceptions of the rural landscape, this section will provide a background on existing conservation strategies as they apply to a rural New England setting. According to Ruhf (1999), without available productive farmland in the future, New England will be hard-pressed to maintain its agricultural industry. In a 15-year period from 1982 to 1997, all six New England states experienced at least a 9% up to a nearly 29% loss of its prime farmland acreage (Heart et al. 2002). Massachusetts by itself experienced a 13.5% drop in farmland during these years, translating into an irretrievable loss of 119,000 acres (Heart et al. 2002). Perhaps a more dramatic indicator, Massachusetts boasted of 35,000 farms in 1945 down to 6,000 in recent years, translating to 1.3 million acres of farmland lost to the pressures of development in little more than half a century (Heart et al. 2002). According to the American Farmland Trust (2005, middle of first page; emphasis added), “Massachusetts now ranks second in the country in its rate of agricultural land loss, having lost ten percent of its land in farms in just 5 years (from 1997-2002).” Weigh this consideration against the fact that as of 2005, not even 11 percent of Massachusetts farmland has any kind of permanent protection (American Farmland Trust 2005), and that 40 acres of land are lost each day to development in Massachusetts (American Farmland Trust 2004) and the mandate for protecting priority lands is increasingly clear.

Still, the loss of farmland and forests can only be a concern if they provide intrinsic and extrinsic value to a region to begin with. Daniels and Bowers (1997) argue that our nation’s security rests in large measure on the recognition of farmland as a strategic resource. Additionally important are the benefits to wildlife habitat that such rural landscapes can provide by virtue of their extensive connectivity of ecological resources (Heart et al. 2002). New England states have valuable agricultural and forestry exports that may be in operation across the entire region or localized to specific states. Massachusetts, for example, is known as a worldwide cranberry exporter, exceeded in production only by Wisconsin (Heart et al. 2002). Although Vermont holds worldwide acclaim for its
maple sugar production, such operations can be found in abundance throughout rural landscapes in Massachusetts and other neighboring states. Orchards and dairy farms are other examples of working landscapes that several New England states share. It cannot be overemphasized that the entire region benefits from its proximity to these natural and cultural landscapes.

Because of the boost that all of New England receives from the tourism industry, it is all the more vital from an economic standpoint that such resources are protected. Daniels and Bowers (1997, 18) note that “Farming provides jobs not just on the farm but also in the transportation, processing, and marketing of farm products and in farm support businesses – the feed, seed, hardware, and machinery dealerships. In several states ... farmland and open space are the foundation of an important tourism industry.” Heart et al. (2002) bolster this argument, pointing to the importance of diversification of the region's economy, the interdependence of local industry, local access to agricultural products, and the recreational and scenic amenities to locals and tourists alike. The reduced cost of public services for areas of undeveloped land, increased ecological diversity and stability, and reduced air and water pollution per acre should be factored into the cost-benefit equation as well (Heart et al. 2002).

Voluntary Methods of Land Conservation

“For private landowners who are willing to protect land in a voluntary way and outside the realm of government, land trusts are a flexible, creative, and successful means of saving important natural areas and farmland.”

- Daniels and Bowers 1997, 193

While landowners are often reticent to work cooperatively with government entities when making decisions regarding the future of their land, farmers and other estate-holders may realize significant monetary benefits and avoid the pressure to subdivide by learning about all the options available, both within and outside voluntary government programs (Ruhf 1999; Ward 2001). People wishing to hold onto and permanently protect the working and/or scenic values of their properties have the option to collaborate with a local, regional, or national land trust. As defined by Daniels and Bowers (1997, 194), “A land trust is a private, nonprofit organization whose primary purpose usually is the direct protection of natural areas and open space.” Conservation tools for protecting scenic, ecological, and working landscapes include temporary measures such as property tax assessment
relief programs, deed restrictions, and leases or management agreements, as well as permanent methods of land protection such as purchase-of-development rights (also known as conservation easements) and outright sales or donations of land or interests in land.

**Temporary Voluntary Measures**

Differential or ‘Current Use’ Assessment (*Massachusetts Chapters 61, 61A, 61B*)

Nearly all states across the nation have some kind of property tax assessment relief program, called differential assessment, to aid in forest, agricultural, and open space protection (Daniels and Bowers 1997). While only temporary forms of land protection, such programs provide incentive and options for farmers who would otherwise possibly be forced to sell off their property; these programs also keep options open for all parties who may have a stake in the future of the land that is enrolled in this program (State Environmental Resource Center 2004; Heart et al. 2002; Ward 2001; Massachusetts Audubon 2004).

Massachusetts uses a deferred taxation program, conferred by its Chapter 61 statute, which is legally enforceable through the first 10 years of agreement (American Farmland Trust 1997). Agricultural lands are enrolled in Chapter 61A, while open space and recreational lands can be protected with Chapter 61B (Massachusetts Audubon 2004; Wood 1998). This program is not only temporary, but an entirely voluntary option for landowners; that is, farmers or other landowners enroll in the program if they wish, although once they enroll they must abide by the rules of the program or potentially forfeit their tax savings (Ward 2001). A certain minimum acreage and a minimum operational time period are required to participate (Heart et al. 2002; Ward 2001).

One key feature of this program particular to Massachusetts is known as a town’s right of first refusal, in which towns are given an option to purchase a property within 120 days of the owner’s official intent to sell (Massachusetts Audubon 2004; State Environmental Resource Center 2004; Ward 2001). This right can be conferred to another organization such as a land trust, and is a key component to the Chapter 61 program (Massachusetts Audubon 2004; State Environmental Resource Center 2004; Ward 2001). But this process has generated some confusion due to how the statute is written, making it less likely to be fully and effectively utilized (Massachusetts Audubon 2004; Ward 2001). Also, as explained by Wood (1998, 3), “The town does not have the option to
purchase the land if agricultural and horticultural use is discontinued, or if a residence for an immediate family member is constructed. However, in this latter case, change of use penalties may apply to affected areas.”

Other Temporary Land Protection Measures

A deed restriction is a temporary form of conservation easement as discussed below. Generally a deed restriction is any kind of arrangement made by the landowner to voluntarily restrict uses on the land. It runs with the deed for a set period of years after which it may be renewed or allowed to expire (Ward 2001). Leases to conservation organizations can also be drafted that allow for ecological management of the land for however long the lease runs (Ward 2001). The landowner can also create a management agreement with a conservation organization, which would then serve as a consultant in the care and management of the landowner's property (Ward 2001).

Permanent Voluntary Measures

Conservation Restrictions

Conservation restrictions (CRs), also commonly known as conservation easements or purchase-of-development rights (PDRs), allow the landowner to sell or donate one of his or her property rights to a public or private organization while retaining title and all other ownership benefits to the land (Ward 2001). In exchange for giving up development rights, the landowner may receive monetary compensation, reduction in property or estate taxes, and the assurance that the land will not be developed by future holders of the land (Ward 2001). The loss to the landowner is in value of the property, as the land is now assessed at its farming and open space value (Daniels and Bowers 1997). These protections are intended to remain in place permanently, even after the land has been sold or otherwise transferred (Heart et al. 2002; Ward 2001; Ruhf 1999). A great advantage here to farmers in particular is the increase in financial planning flexibility (Daniels and Bowers 1997). The disadvantage from an agricultural preservation standpoint may be that this agreement does not stipulate the continuation of farming activities on the land (Daniels and Bowers 1997). But even if the land becomes fallow, as a permanent tool this strategy has particular viability: “Keeping the land
Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs)

The Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program is one of the oldest and perhaps most ambitious state programs implemented to facilitate agricultural preservation through the purchase of conservation easements (American Farmland Trust 2004; Ruhf 1999). Started in 1977, it has been considered by many to serve as a model state PDR program (American Farmland Trust 2004; Ruhf 1999). As with conservation restrictions described above, this agreement reimburses farmers the difference between “fair market value” and “agricultural value” of their land in return for an agricultural easement that prohibits future development (Ward 2001). This restriction also runs with the deed so that future owners must abide by the agreement, although here again the agreement cannot force an owner to keep the land farmed (Ward 2001). As with other CRs, because of the reduction in property value, farmers also see a reduction in inheritance tax burdens, which may make the difference between being forced to sell and being able to hold onto their land for themselves and future kin (Ruhf 1999; Ward 2001; American Farmland Trust 1997).

Other Forms of Permanent Protection

A variety of methods exist that allow a landowner to retain at least partial ownership of the land for a period of time, reduce tax burden such as income, estate or capital gains taxes, and simultaneously place restrictions on the land as a means of permanent protection.

Undivided interests represent a share or percentage of ownership on a parcel that can be donated a portion at a time, from year to year, allowing for financial flexibility on the part of the giver along with the ability to stay on the land until ownership has been fully converted (Ward 2001). This charitable donation permanently removes the share in question from the total estate of the landowner, thereby reducing income taxes, although the owner must still pay property taxes until the land has been surrendered in full to the recipient organization (Ward 2001). A remainder interest with reserved life estate is an alternate donation method that transfers land to the receiving organization in the present, but allows the donor to remain on the property for a certain number of agreed upon years or until the donor’s death (Ward 2001). Donating land as a bequest is a method that also allows
for the owner to live on and use the land as usual during his or her lifetime, with the assurance that upon transfer the property will be managed with the conservation goals and restrictions that the donor sets forth (Ward 2001).

Lifetime donations and sales are ways for landowners to dispose of their land in the short term with reassurance that the land will be managed responsibly in the future (Ward 2001). Outright donations of land or interests in land to a charitable organization with no restrictions on the part of the owner, known as “free and clear” donations, confer the greatest number of tax benefits, as all rights and responsibilities for the land or interest in question are transferred in full at the time of donation (Ward 2001). If the land in question is of prime value from a conservation standpoint and ready funds are available, the owner may be even able to sell it at fair market value (Ward 2001). Other considerations are bargain sales and installment sales, in which the owner agrees to sell at less than market value, or to receive installments for the sale, opening up opportunity for the purchasing organization to gain lands they could not compete for on the open market (Ward 2001).

Landowners may also consider limited development of their land, preferably in conjunction with a conservation or agricultural restriction (Daniels and Bowers 1997). In combination with a conservation restriction, this option can sometimes be almost as financially lucrative as selling the property outright, although the extent to which this option is pursued needs careful consideration in terms of financial and legal ramifications for the farmer, who may be inviting future farming-residential conflicts that could spell the failure of the business (Daniels and Bowers 1997).

Land Preservation Options for Non-Landowners

A few options exist for community members who own small lots or other property that is unsuitable for preservation, yet wish to support their community’s efforts in preserving other lands. Property owners can donate their real estate directly to a conservation organization that may utilize funds from its sale to raise money for conservation restrictions or properties elsewhere, or the landowner can set up a charitable remainder trust to benefit the organization (Ward 2001). In both cases property owners can simultaneously ease their own tax burdens or those of their heirs, ensure a lifetime income, and know they are contributing positively to the preservation of cherished landscapes in their communities (Ward 2001).
Regulatory Methods of Land Conservation

“Many rural landowners simply distrust government; they hold dear their private property rights and bristle at the possibility of tighter land-use regulation.”

- Daniels and Bowers 1997, 193

State-Enabling Legislation

Community Preservation Act

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts instituted the Community Preservation Act (CPA) in 2000, an enabling program that allows municipalities to increase the property tax levy by a maximum of 3%, providing a state-matched fund for open space preservation, historic preservation, and affordable housing according to local priorities after meeting a minimum of 10% annual set-aside in each category (Bristow, Skala, and Pelletier 2004; Community Preservation Coalition 2006). As of November 2006, over a third of Massachusetts cities and towns have voted in the CPA (Community Preservation Coalition 2006).

The CPA has generated controversy, primarily because some assert that it overrides Proposition 2½, a measure designed to keep property taxes from increasing by more than 2½ percent each year (Daily Hampshire Gazette 2005). Some people who speak out against the CPA are not necessarily opposed to the spirit of the program, but rather feel that it misdirects funds badly needed for other services (Daily Hampshire Gazette 2005). Another argument is that this program, despite one of its stated goals of generating more affordable housing, in fact activates a loophole that undercuts statewide efforts to push all communities to meet a 10% affordable housing minimum (Tuerck 2001). One viewpoint is that the program inhibits a larger picture approach, and adopting local planning measures such as the CPA in isolation can actually backfire from a perspective of what is best for the region (Daily Hampshire Gazette 2005). On the other hand, the CPA generates badly needed funding from the state, and has a minimal impact on those who can least afford an increase in taxes (Daily Hampshire Gazette 2005). While it may spark controversy in many places, as more communities vote in the measure, other communities will better be able to gauge whether the program may indeed be a viable option for their own situations.
Executive Order 418 (EO 418)

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts implemented Executive Order 418 (EO 418) in 2000 as an incentive tool, offering up to $30,000 in funding to municipalities willing to make affordable housing a priority (Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission 2005). This funding initiative was designed to facilitate the creation of a Community Development Plan to identify opportunities for affordable housing, economic development, transportation and open space (Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission 2005). According to Lowitt et al. (2006), EO 418 has been “the most far reaching and well-funded planning program in recent years,” fostering interagency collaboration, community planning and implementation, and providing a solid foundation for building sound planning policy in the future.

Massachusetts Zoning

Massachusetts is a “home-rule” state, which confers the ability for local government to pass laws and make decisions independently, provided they do not undermine or contradict the laws explicitly established at the state level (Levy 2006). Because of this, the state takes a largely hands-off approach when it comes to regulatory action for many matters, including land use, planning, and zoning laws. Despite the apparent flexibility this home-rule amendment bestows upon local government, many feel that Massachusetts ties the hands of its local policymakers with outdated laws that only encourage the rapid conversion of rural and scenic landscapes: “Although technically a ‘home-rule’ state, the statutes that govern planning and land use regulation are so restrictive to local authority as to make home-rule more an illusion than a reality in Massachusetts” (Zoning Reform Working Group n.d.).

Planning tools that are effective in other states are often inappropriate to Massachusetts due to its unique land-use challenges as well as its outdated state regulations (Zoning Reform Working Group n.d.). Massachusetts regulations are singular in allowing unlimited roadside, low density development with no accompanying subdivision review, a process known as Approval Not Required, or ANR (Zoning Reform Working Group n.d.). Although two-thirds of the states have laws requiring local land-use regulations to adhere to the community’s master plan, Massachusetts does not even require municipalities to adopt a master plan, often rendering planning initiatives ineffectual (Zoning Reform Working Group n.d.). In addition, a zoning freeze, or “grandfathering,”
may be permitted for up to 8 years in Massachusetts (Zoning Reform Working Group n.d.), a critical loophole which further erodes planning efforts at the local level and is unmatched in scope anywhere else in the nation. Only in this state, a full two-thirds majority vote is required to adopt or change local zoning ordinances (Zoning Reform Working Group n.d.), an often insurmountable obstacle to planning progress. These weaknesses in state law may well be encouraging sprawling development that erodes the rural landscape over time and prohibits the ability to maintain an interconnected pattern of farmland or open space so critical to the ecological, cultural, and, ultimately, the economic health of Massachusetts (Zoning Reform Working Group n.d.).

Local Land-Use Controls

Municipal Strategies

Several methods for preservation of landscapes and rural character are available for towns to consider integrating into their local legislation. Some of these regulations may directly restrict the landowner or farmer, while others more silently support the continuation of local agricultural practices and open space preservation. Supportive regulations include creating a broad definition of the term “farming” to allow retention and evolution of a wide variety of operations such as crops, livestock, nurseries, and Christmas tree farms, as well as related agriculture-dependent industries like retail, transportation, and storage (Heart et al. 2002; Daniels and Bowers 1997). Another tactic that may serve to protect agricultural practices and keep farming viable is the duplication of state right-to-farm laws at the local level, which afford some level of legal protection from nuisance lawsuits resulting from the expansion of development to the borders of farmlands (Heart et al. 2002). Towns can additionally require buffers or setbacks to separate residential from farming or forestry operations (Heart et al. 2002). Streamlining the permit review process, establishing “flexible” performance zoning, employing a “one-stop” permitting process for complex projects, granting farming/forestry permits by right while limiting the need for special permits, and allowing compatible by-right or accessory agricultural uses are some other assistive tools (Heart et al. 2002). Not all communities in all states are able to implement this full suite of tools, constrained as they may be by the legal, political, or physical realities of their particular region, but they begin to give an
idea of how local legislation can affect the possibilities for the local survival and long-term health of an agricultural way of life.

Transfer of Development Rights

According to state law provisions (Chapter 40A), Massachusetts enables local governments to implement a program commonly known as the transfer of development rights, or TDRs. The TDR program serves as a regulatory but in most cases fully voluntary, market-driven tool that permits a private sale of rights between owners of two potentially developable parcels (American Farmland Trust 1997; Green Valley Institute 2007; Executive Office of Environmental Affairs 2005). The seller “sends” the rights from the “sending area” to the owner of the “receiving area,” and in return is usually paid whatever compensation the private market will bear (American Farmland Trust 1997; Green Valley Institute 2007; Executive Office of Environmental Affairs 2005). The receiver, usually a developer, is permitted to build or expand residential or commercial development at higher than permitted densities, or is sometimes given other permissions not normally granted under existing zoning bylaws (American Farmland Trust 1997; Executive Office of Environmental Affairs 2005; Daniels and Bowers 1997). For proper effectiveness, the landowner in the “sending” area should be in a position to maximize profits by taking full advantage of local zoning and should own land that is ecologically or agriculturally sensitive (American Farmland Trust 1997; Daniels and Bowers 1997). In selling off these rights, the seller is agreeing to a permanent deed restriction on the land in question (American Farmland Trust 1997; Executive Office of Environmental Affairs 2005; Daniels and Bowers 1997). The landowner may also sell these development rights to a TDR bank if one has been established, a temporary device that allows the municipality or other entity to buy and store the development rights until an interested developer is found for the receiving area (American Farmland Trust 1997; Green Valley Institute 2007; Executive Office of Environmental Affairs 2005; Daniels and Bowers 1997).

The TDR option in either case is entirely voluntary on the part of the landowner, except in some states (not including Massachusetts) where TDRs are implemented at the same time as some form of downzoning, such as agricultural protection zoning (American Farmland Trust 1997; Daniels and Bowers 1997). In this case, the TDR is still not a strictly mandatory measure since the landowner has the choice to either accept the reduced value of the downzoned property or to
transfer the development rights at full value to an interested developer or a TDR bank, if available (American Farmland Trust 1997; Daniels and Bowers 1997).

Both the opportunities and drawbacks of TDRs are high, making this one of the most underutilized of land preservation tools that could realize considerable and effective benefits under the right conditions (Daniels and Bowers 1997). Some strong points of TDRs include the voluntary nature of the program for landowners, the omission of need for public funding to purchase development rights, the ability for farmers and other landowners to realize development profits on their land while keeping it in otherwise full possession, and the permanence of agricultural or open space protection (American Farmland Trust 1997; Daniels and Bowers 1997; Executive Office of Environmental Affairs 2005). Significant disincentives exist for local policymakers to embrace this technique, however, primarily because the program is technically burdensome to implement in both time and effort, relies heavily on market pressures and timing, and brings the potential for contentious public opinion on the suitability of the receiving area for higher density development (Daniels and Bowers 1997; American Farmland Trust 1997). “Higher density development is a politically charged topic in communities and often requires a significant outreach effort to gain acceptance” (Executive Office of Environmental Affairs 2005).

One common but telling obstacle to the success of a TDR program is that it depends for its success on a community master planning process (Sprawl Watch 2005). Those who keep and update a long-range community plan are best-positioned to implement the TDR program with relative ease (Sprawl Watch 2005). Also, the TDR program is not such an effective tool in smaller, low-growth communities; as Daniels and Bowers (1997, 176) explain, “TDRs have not worked well in purely rural areas because there is not enough population growth or demand for new housing.” But the implementation of a TDR program need not be restricted to a single community, and this next section explains the benefits of planning on a regional level, particularly in places with no county or regional government control.

Multi-Jurisdictional Planning

One argument for planning in cooperation across districts is the ability to work towards a larger vision of preserved landscapes that weave across communities in contiguous threads of connectivity. Daniels drives home this point in a political and economic context, stating: “While some
natural areas and recreation lands can prosper as stand alone preserved parcels, the creation of islands of preserved farm and forest lands does little to promote these industries other than to maintain some open space. Developers in turn may find such spotty preservation as simply obstructionist” (n.d., 10).

Daniels (n.d.) drew upon the land preservation experiences of three northeastern states (New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylania) to conclude that inter-district cooperation is a critical component for successful land use planning at the state or local levels. The three states in question have not enacted planning or zoning measures at the county level, so that instances of successful multi-municipal planning efforts went a long way in providing a regional context for land preservation (Daniels n.d.). Such examples highlighted the particularly effective role that a TDR program can play across several communities (Daniels n.d.), and also showed how some innovative steps at the state level could encourage a local “multi-municipal plan” between interested municipalities.

Other Land-Use Regulations

Some methods employed in many areas of the country are not popular or even feasible options everywhere, but they are worth reviewing in this context. Some states or counties strongly define their agricultural districts, by introducing either agricultural zoning or agricultural overlay districts (Heart et al. 2002; Daniels and Bowers 1997; American Farmland Trust 1997). Massachusetts does not have a statewide policy on agricultural districts, but local towns are free to develop their own under constitutional home-rule amendment (Levy 2006). Agricultural districts are designed to encourage higher-density cluster zoning (Heart et al. 2002), and as such may not be appropriate for some low-density rural settings. In some places, most often in well-populated regions, municipalities define growth boundaries around urban or town centers (Heart et al. 2002). This technique has rarely been used in New England but has notably been applied in some western states such as Oregon (Heart et al. 2002).

Some towns may find it reasonable to restrict certain non-farm uses by limiting allowable densities or employing cluster zoning such as Open Space Residential Development to provide limited protection for farm and forest resources (Heart et al. 2002). Area allocation zoning, a mandatory form of limited development as described earlier under Voluntary Methods of Land Conservation, limits the sale and subdivision of a farm lot while still allowing a certain amount of
building to take place on a portion of the land that is considered least viable for farming, based on total acreage (Heart et al. 2002; Daniels and Bowers 1997; American Farmland Trust 1997). This tool is most compatible in places where space and zoning laws can afford large-acre lots (Heart et al. 2002; Daniels and Bowers 1997; American Farmland Trust 1997). In Massachusetts, with its typical 1- to 4-acre zoning, such a strategy may be largely impractical.

**Capital Investment as a Land-Use Control**

A central and powerful way that towns can control the pattern of land use and development is through the careful and directed management of capital expenditures (Levy 2006). Placing limits and restrictions on water and sewer infrastructure development is one way that a town can strategically utilize its capital investments to discourage expansion of residential or commercial development into low-density areas (Heart et al. 2002). Even more fundamentally, how and where roadways are built or improved can greatly control the direction of new development (Levy 2006). With roadway access established and municipal water and sewer services available, little if anything can be done to discourage developers from taking full advantage of lucrative development possibilities (Levy 2006).

**Conclusions**

This review of recent literature encompasses research and writings on a variety of topics that center on character and identity of place as perceived by the people who call it home, or who make their living in one way or another from the land. Even the most entrenched of city dwellers are not exempt from some sort of stake in how rural or other lands are managed, for in some fashion every human being is tied to and dependent upon the land, however remotely. For this reason alone it is imperative to uncover the assumptions, attitudes, and emotions that are inherent in the connection between person and place. In this research, a close look at these factors in a rural region of a state troubled by significant land-use challenges will hopefully help to illuminate the recesses of personal values and impulses that are pertinent to any requisite decisions to be made regarding these lands.
CHAPTER III

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

To better understand how rural character, place attachment, and attitudes toward planning can be synthesized, this study looked at a region of five contiguous rural towns in Western Massachusetts that are beset to varying degrees by the encroachment of suburban settlement patterns.

Study Area

Lying just to the west of the Connecticut River Valley, the study area includes the towns of Ashfield, Chesterfield, Conway, Goshen, and Williamsburg. One of these towns, Conway, was the same location in which a previous study in this series was conducted by Lokocz (2005). Together these towns nearly cover an estimated 98,000-acre region, or approximately 153 square miles, within the Highlands, a band of 38 communities resting along a north-south axis of the state across the foothills of the Berkshires (see Map of Study Area, Appendix B).

The five-town study area was selected for multiple reasons, but primarily for the rural quality of each of its towns and its proximity to swift regional suburban growth. It was additionally targeted because of the opportunity afforded to further investigate and contribute to the findings of the previous Conway survey. Finally, this region was chosen for the significant opportunity to tie in with the Five Town Action Initiative, a collaborative process already underway between the Highland Communities Initiative (HCI), the Center for Rural Massachusetts (CRM), and the newly formed Five Town Steering Committee (Center for Rural Massachusetts 2005). This Action Initiative represents an effort to implement strategies that the towns have already identified based on individual town values and priorities (Center for Rural Massachusetts 2005). This paper, then, is intended to work in tandem with the larger activities of the Action Initiative and to potentially help to inform the process
by elucidating the attitudes and concerns of the local residents in regards to rural planning efforts in their individual and surrounding communities.

The five towns that are included in the sample area, while contiguous, are geographically and politically divided into two distinct regions. The southern three towns, Chesterfield, Goshen, and Williamsburg, are all within Hampshire County, share boundaries with one another, and are all accessed primarily from one main roadway, Route 9. Chesterfield is ultimately accessed by Route 143, branching off of Route 9 to the west. Conway and Ashfield, falling within Franklin County, are both accessed further north via Route 116. Both major highways, Routes 9 and 116, branch to the northwest from the Interstate 91 corridor that runs north-south through the Connecticut River Valley.

The southern three towns additionally share the commonality of close proximity to the city of Northampton, with a population just short of 30,000 (City of Northampton 2005, from U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Northampton is a cultural attraction for the region and a gathering spot for the large body of students from a premium consortium of colleges in the area. This destination town also benefits by its central position relative to major metropolitan centers in the region, including Boston to the east and New York City to the south. Given these factors, Northampton stands poised to witness strong and steady growth, even in the face of apparent downward population trends for the state at large. Because of this, the three towns of Chesterfield, Goshen, and Williamsburg have the greatest likelihood of experiencing subsequent developmental impact from this growth.

The northernmost towns of Conway and Ashfield are not very much further away geographically, and are in fact within reasonable commuting distance from Northampton as well. However, topography and roadway patterns suggest stronger ties of these two rural communities to the nearby towns of Amherst and Greenfield, smaller but likewise culturally attractive towns to the north of Northampton. Overall these factors support at least a fractionally greater risk for the southern three towns to witness a small-scale version of suburban sprawl. Indeed this may already be perceived as the reality in Williamsburg, which has the largest population of the five communities - just over 2400 people (Highland Communities Initiative 2005, from U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Interestingly however, Williamsburg has actually seen the least amount of growth of all five towns between 1930 and 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000a), with an increase of only about 28%. In contrast, both Ashfield and Conway have more than doubled in size in the same time frame, Chesterfield has
nearly tripled, and Goshen has come close to reaching four times the population it held in 1930 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000a). Possibly even more telling is the change in population seen between 1970 and 2000. Goshen experienced the most dramatic increase at 91%, with Conway and Chesterfield both roughly experiencing a 70 – 80% increase in numbers according to U.S. Census Bureau (2000a) reports. Ashfield saw about a 40% increase while Williamsburg only experienced a 4% overall increase in population, yet during this time actually lost 3% of its numbers in the period between 1990 and 2000.

As a basis for comparison, the 2000 Census by the U.S. Census Bureau (Highland Communities Initiative 2005, from U.S. Census Bureau 2000) indicates that Highlands communities in Franklin County rose 35% in population overall and those in Hampshire County nearly 50%. Chesterfield and Goshen far exceed the average population growth for Highland communities to the south and Conway also has experienced a more rapid influx of people than is typical for the northern Highlands (Highland Communities Initiative 2005, from U.S. Census Bureau 2000). From these statistics it can be gleaned that Ashfield has remained insulated from recent growth uncharacteristic of its region, and that Williamsburg, while starting much higher in population to begin with, has at least momentarily capped in recent years and has begun a slight decline, vastly contradicting trends in neighboring rural towns (Highland Communities Initiative 2005, from U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Given these figures, Chesterfield, Goshen and Conway appear to rest on the frontier of new development that may increasingly present itself as rural sprawl in the coming years.

**Contribution to the Field**

By analyzing attitudes that prevail across the five-town region, this research is intended to contribute simultaneously to the local planning initiatives already underway and to the larger body of knowledge in design and planning. The results from this research may help to bolster previous research on how landscape preference and place attachment might inform the likelihood of acceptance of certain planning practices and strategies. The research can also draw attention to the growing body of literature that has begun to bridge the land planning and design fields with the seemingly disparate disciplines of psychology and environmental health.
Goal

The overarching goal of this research is to aid design and planning professionals to formulate continually informed and responsive strategies for land preservation. It is hoped this will be at least partially achieved by illuminating how perceptions held by rural townspeople about their connection to the landscape relate to their opinions about actions taken by government to protect the landscape.

Objectives

1. To learn more about the reasons people develop strong attachments to landscape and the reasons many seek out rural places to live.

2. To reveal preferences people have for different kinds of landscapes that may motivate them to want to see certain places preserved over others.

3. To explore the influence that local perceptions about the rural landscape have on attitudes towards the planning practices that may affect community members’ rights as landowners and farmers.

Research Questions

1. What are some underlying values that contribute to the attachment or attraction a person may have for the character of rural places (i.e. visual characteristics, emotional bonds, restorative functions)?

2. Are there certain types of rural landscapes that people prefer over others and would therefore be more likely to form attachments to based primarily on their visual characteristics?

3. To what extent do the perceptions people have of the rural landscape inform or predict their attitudes regarding land preservation and development?

Hypothesis

Based on the two previous surveys in this series of studies, it may be hypothesized that length of residency and perception of rural change will play key factors in both place attachment and support for conservation practices (Walker 2003; Lokocz 2005).

In Walker’s 2003 survey of Monmouth, Maine, the longer term residents exhibited an attachment to a full array of natural and cultural features within the town, while shorter term residents indicated a particular preference for natural settings. In Walker's (2003) research, those who
perceived change over time gravitated toward agricultural scenes and cultural features of town, and were generally the same group that had lived in the community the longest. Both of these factors positively correlated with support for conservation practices that could preserve these amenities, both at the town and personal levels (Walker 2003). The study in Conway, Massachusetts, also found that residency length and change seen over time were both factors in how strongly respondents exhibited attachment to their landscapes, and how likely they were to support preservation of land (Lokocz 2005). Longer term residents showed greater attachment to the land and also showed a greater awareness of community change. They were generally supportive of conservation techniques, yet did not show a high level of personal willingness to consider conservation options on their own land.

It is expected that in-depth interviewing, while limited in statistical conclusiveness, will reflect the general demographic differences highlighted in these previous studies, as well as further explore the reluctance that some have to personally engage in conservation practices and perhaps also bring to light some of the reasons that other residents may be more likely to consider such alternatives.
CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

In selecting a methodology for this study, several factors affected the decision. These included consideration of the methodologies utilized in the two previous research studies by Lokocz (2005) and Walker (2003), the time involved for various approaches and logistics in terms of reaching the targeted communities.

Choosing the Survey Instrument

In deciding what type of survey method to employ, different types of interview styles were reviewed. Interviews can range from structured (or standard) to unstructured (or unstandard). Babbie (1992) describes structured interviewing as a survey research technique that is weak on validity, or the ability of a measurement to measure what is intended, but strong on reliability, or getting dependable results with repeated measurements (Babbie 1992). Unstructured interviews, according to Babbie (1992), involve an interaction where the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry and does not rely on a prescripted list of questions. These types of interviews are like conversations with a general direction and pursuit of topics raised by the respondent in which the respondent does most of the talking (Babbie 1992). The interviewer begins with a few questions and the initial answers shape subsequent questions. In this research, a semistructured in-depth interview has been chosen as the preferred survey method, primarily because of the comparatively high level of validity this method offers (Babbie 1992). With this method, both formal survey methods and field research techniques can be borrowed, so that some level of both reliability and validity may be obtained (Babbie 1992).

The previous two research studies in this series, Walker (2003) and Lokocz (2005), both utilized a written, self-administered survey, each targeting a single rural community. Both researchers sent out 500 surveys apiece, and generally had up to a 38% response rate. In the present case,
because the study area covers five contiguous rural communities, such a survey would need to canvass a larger number of people to be equally effective as a representative sample. Also, given that the survey conducted by Lokocz (2005) has already gathered some generalizable results from one of these five communities, interviews may be the best way to complement the research, as they can help qualitatively interpret the quantitative data that came out of the prior study. Additionally, the out-of-pocket monetary costs of another survey could become prohibitive and would require additional funding to be implemented.

A series of two to three focus groups was also considered as a survey method. Benefits would include potentially reaching more people than the interview approach would yield, as well as the opportunity to glean unexpected data through the process of letting people interact and react to one another's ideas and comments (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). Focus groups also have the advantages that a great deal of information can come out of a relatively short period of interviewing time, and that they are relatively inexpensive to administer, therefore an economic means of data gathering (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). The primary weakness is the amount of pre-planning that is involved, and the difficulty in ensuring a large and diverse turnout of residents (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). Also considered a potential weakness is the extent to which the respondents who do turn out feel comfortable amongst their peers in expressing their full and true opinions, and to which some members of the group may have more opportunity and desire to speak than others (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). Additionally, the planned meetings of the Five Town Action Initiative may have possibly conflicted with focus group meetings, making interviews a better fit with current planning activities happening within the towns.

**Interview Methods**

The chosen research method was to interview a range of people across the five-town region. While initially it was hoped that the sample size would come close to 15 people, time and resource constraints kept the number of interviews conducted to 10. In either case, such a sample would be considered too small to constitute a statistically representative sample of the community at large and therefore not as generalizable as other methods discussed. To some extent results from this method may be considered anecdotal, and where conclusions cannot be drawn regarding potential demographic relationships the data may be primarily useful in this regard. Despite this consideration,
every attempt was made to collect a representative range of opinions so that some basic statistical conclusions could still be drawn while acknowledging the shortcomings of basing such conclusions on so few respondents. The strengths inherent in this method include rating high on validity and medium on reliability. The interviews lasted an average of about 60 minutes.

In choosing the subjects, a variety of strategies were employed in an attempt to achieve maximum infiltration into the communities, so that opinions could be gathered from people who keep a lower profile in the community as well as those who are highly visible. These strategies were somewhat akin to snowball sampling employed in field research (Babbie 1992), in which word-of-mouth techniques are employed to dig deeply into a particular group of people to get to the people one most wants to talk to. In this case contacts who were not eligible to be interviewed simply served as a way to reach those who were.

To start with, thesis committee members suggested names of either potential interviewees or people ideally situated to provide further names. Next, drawing on personal connections the author had in the study area, acquaintances within these communities were asked to supply names of potential respondents to fill out the range of demographics sought. Out of the resulting list of names, one person from each of a number of general demographic subgroups was approached. If that person happened to be unavailable for interview then another from the subgroup would be targeted. In this manner, a range of demographic subgroups was generally represented, keeping in mind the constraints of the sample size as discussed earlier.

Members of the community were targeted in a range of categories that were not mutually exclusive. These categories included method of livelihood (local business/service, local land-based business/service, or non-local), length of residency, and level of landownership. The targeted parties were balanced across all the towns, with two people represented from each town. One person did not technically live within the study area at the time of the interview, but because of significant personal and family history as well as occupational, social, and political ties to the town in question, it was determined that the individual would still be able to provide a valid and thorough perspective.

The final sample of 10 interviewees included four males and six females. Participants’ ages were not directly asked, but were screened in advance using estimates provided by those who helped identify interviewees, in an attempt to ensure a range of ages were represented. According to these estimates, two individuals were over 70 years of age and one was under 30, with the rest roughly
divided in equal parts between 30-50 and 50-70. Four people were employed locally in land-based occupations (either currently or prior to retirement) that included rock quarrying, maple sugar farming, dairy farming, and milling lumber. Another two people owned local businesses, one a retail hardware store and the other a bar establishment. Two people, a consulting forester and a part-time housecleaner, work in a variety of on-site locations both in and out of town. These respondents were categorized as “non-local” in occupation, since their work was not specifically tied to the towns in which they resided. Two respondents commute to work exclusively out of town, one a recent resident and the other a lifetime resident. Although technically categorized as “non-land-based” and “non-local” in occupation, this last respondent came from a family that had for generations been employed locally in land-based work.

Of the 10 people interviewed, three were residents within the study area for at least 30 years; of these, two were lifetime residents with generational history in the town. Five other respondents had lived in the area between 10 and 29 years and the remaining two had lived there less than 10 years. Half the respondents owned less than 5 acres and the other half owned over 20 acres of land. Those who owned less than 5 acres included one renter. When asked to characterize their involvement in local politics, six were more active, having served on several boards or in a significant position in town, and four were less active, describing limited involvement locally. Nobody interviewed described themselves as completely non-active in local government affairs.

**Interview Questions**

To provide the structural components of the interview process, a list of interview questions was developed that would guide the direction of the interview and provide a reasonable basis for comparison. A written set of questions, as listed in Appendix A, was mailed to each participant prior to the interview. This list of questions guided the interview itself. The questions highlighted in bold were sent to participants prior to the interviews to prepare them for the themes and general proceedings of the interview. Those not in bold were asked only during the interview as a way to expand on the critical questions in bold. Anything in italics was not voiced unless the respondent needed additional prompting due to misunderstanding the question or not having familiarity with the subject. Interviewees were instructed to specify when they are referring to communities other than their own when replying to the more specific place-based questions.
Analyzing the Data

The recorded interviews were semi-transcribed, meaning that key words and phrases that the interviewee used were written from the recordings rather than a precise word-for-word transcription. Exact quotes were delineated as such and provided a source from which to cull important quotations later on.

When the conversation contained long descriptions not additionally informative to the main response, only the distilled concept was included. This provided a beginning stage for sorting and analyzing the data, as decisions had to be made regarding the applicability of much of the data to the study. This is to acknowledge that the transcribed documents were intended to retain the ideas and flow but not a faithful record of what took place during the interview.

The semi-transcribed interviews were formatted initially in the order that the questions were asked, and then recombined or reformatted to list all the interview answers together for each individual question. This reformatting represents the second stage of analysis, in which the text was further distilled to capture essential concepts and ideas, and some answers may have been broken up and shuffled around in cases where the respondents were in fact answering a different question in the interview. Here the author’s interpretation of the relevance of answers to questions and the essence of the information being communicated was of key importance as this interpretation took the data one more step away from the original source, as a method of qualitative research using cross-case analysis (Dye et al. 2000, from Patton 1990).

Finally, the reformatted questions formed the basis for grouping the data under larger central themes to display the key concepts that arose from the interviews. These are discussed in the Results chapter by question category, with the inclusion of a table to help visually summarize some of the data.

The methodology chosen in this survey was one of many alternative options explored. It is anticipated that this set of methods will provide a good fit by qualitatively augmenting the two earlier studies in this research series, as well as being the most effective way to gather a lot of pertinent data within a relatively short period of time. Any method has its inherent strengths and weaknesses as far as data collection, analysis, and conclusiveness are concerned. While every attempt will be made to acknowledge the relative validity of any conclusions drawn based on this chosen methodology, it should be understood that, overall, conclusions will rely heavily on anecdote and less so on a
statistically reliable demographic breakdown of this sample set. The outstanding strength of this chosen set of methods will be in its ability to tell a story from the compelling viewpoint of a few of the rural townspeople whose homes and livelihoods may be at stake in every land-use decision made by neighbors, town representatives, or even distant policymakers at the state and federal levels.
CHAPTER V

RESULTS: INTERVIEW OUTCOMES

In order to address the stated goals, objectives, and questions central to the purpose of this research, the interview responses were organized within the context of three overarching themes, to include Attachment to Local Place, Rural Perceptions and Values, and Attitudes towards Land Conservation vs. Development. Within each of these themes, questions are compiled into groups and presented out of the original order in which they were asked during the interview to facilitate a thematic discussion of the data.

Three Themes

Attachment to Local Place

A primary objective of this study is to learn more about the reasons people develop strong attachments to landscape and the reasons many seek out or remain in the rural places in which they’ve chosen to live. The following questions centered on the personal connection that the respondents had with their towns.

Value of Living in Town

To learn about the participants’ perceptions of, and attachment to, the rural lifestyle, they were asked what parts of living in their respective towns they most valued. Responses included the sense of community, ease of community involvement, the openness of the land, the quiet, and having a backyard and a good school for their children. A new resident (<10 years living in the area) emphasized that a rural lifestyle means “feeling part of a community, feeling accepted, being able to walk into our little store here and everybody knows you, they’re gonna say ‘hi,’ they know about your family.” Another person valued “working outside on the farm and being in the woods.” One noted with pride
that “We still don't have a stoplight in town.” Another respondent pointed out the small delights of living in a rural place such as being able drive through town with a minimal need to step on the brakes of her vehicle. She added, “Well, really what I value the most is that it allows me to live sheltered, away from a lot of the other harsh realities that do go on every day on this globe.” In discussing the lack of crime (indicated by “no drive-by shootings” and “low murder”) that she enjoyed by living in a rural place, she brought up the concept of “country justice”. She perceived this phenomenon as part of what makes a rural place feel safe, in which people take care of their own and keep the “bad element” out of the community:

> There are certain things that you just cannot expect the locals, the long time locals to endure. There is a threshold where you cross a certain bound and the country justice is going to come and surface and make you go away in some way, because there's just certain bounds that you can't cross.

This comment helps to illustrate how strongly the rural community protects the insiders, or those who have been in town long enough to be accepted and trusted, while being apt to mistrust outsiders or newcomers to town who may prove to be a threat to the rural way of living or the people who make up the community.

One person didn’t feel so connected to the community any more despite having spent nearly all of his 70-plus years in residence: “The families that I knew when I was living here growing up as a kid, most aren’t here anymore.” Another lifelong resident also discussed the changes seen over time:

> The openness of the landscape is a tremendous value. Hate to see that disappear. . . . Now going to the general store and the post office I don't know everyone anymore, but I do know many, many people and you can stop for a casual conversation over a cup of coffee at the store or when picking up mail at the post office.

Additionally, one respondent, who makes a living from the land, expressed that her connection to this place was tied directly to how she envisioned its future:

> I think we're going to get a new wave of development. . . . It would be awful to see. I mean first off is that we have enough houses on the road we live on. But who am I to say that the guy up the road who has a farm shouldn't put up 10 houses and become a millionaire selling house lots? Who am I to say? That's his or her right. But I would have to move if that happened, there would be too many people.

**Reasons Moved or Returned to Rural Area**

The interviewees were asked what brought them to their respective communities to find out how and why people were drawn to the rural landscape. Two respondents had been born and raised
in the community in which their families had lived for generations, had left for a period of time and eventually returned. One respondent did not technically live in the study area but owned land and a business in town. He had been born and raised in that community, left, and then later returned to start a business on his family’s land. He explained that he saw an entrepreneurial opportunity at the time and took it, but had not planned before that time to return. All three respondents cited family connections and local ties as the reason they returned after their time away.

The seven respondents who had moved to the community after having grown up elsewhere were asked what prompted the move. Two people indicated factors that suggested they came deliberately for the rural lifestyle, one of whom was attracted to a place where people know each other, a place with fewer people and houses, and a place with a good school system that is ideal to raise children. One stated she came for the “small town life. I was very, very attracted to it. I grew up in a relatively small community for its time in the 50s where there was just a Main Street and people knew you, and I thrive on that kind of existence.”

Five total respondents moved to their communities for reasons that did not include mention of the appeal of the rural experience. One did voice a love for the rural community and felt that choosing a career in forestry inevitably led to living in a rural place, but did not cite an attraction to a rural place as directly affecting the choice to move to town. Two others came here specifically to open local businesses but did not cite other reasons for moving to a rural place. A fourth respondent came to begin a land-based business with a spouse who had a family history in town. Finally, one person married into the community as the sole motive for moving there. One of the people who had moved into town within the last 30 years to operate a local business explained later in the interview that “I’m a city person, not a country person; I would not choose to live in the country, but [this community] is a nice blend because it’s close enough to shopping and to stores and to 91 [interstate highway] so I don’t feel trapped in the middle of nowhere.”

This same respondent went on to emphasize the proximity of this rural place to major cultural centers, pointing out how this community is situated “in a unique position where, you know, in half an hour I can be in Vermont, in half an hour I can be in Connecticut, I’m only two and a half hours from New York City, three hours at the most, and in two hours I can be in Boston, and to me those are short distances.”
These results suggest that attachment to place in some of these cases was inextricably tied to family and personal connections, so that it may be difficult to tease out the connection to the rural experience as a distinct factor. Also, attraction to these communities was contingent upon circumstances that appeared unrelated to the desire to move to a rural place, although it is possible that such motivations existed but were simply not expressed. While two respondents did reveal that their decision to live in a rural environment for its own sake was purposeful, this response was lower than what perhaps might be expected. The two residents who had moved to town for the rural experience both had lived in town for less than 30 years, owned less than 5 acres of land, and did not earn their living directly from the land.

**Significant Places**

Another question addressed place attachment by asking respondents to identify places in town that were significant to them. To prompt responses, follow-up questions asked them to identify where, for instance, they might bring out-of-town guests or perhaps what places they would miss if they moved away. Seven people (70%) responded by naming recreational spots that allowed for such activities as swimming, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, hiking, picnicking, etc. Four respondents (40%) identified places along roads or trails that had particularly scenic views, and one mentioned little local cemeteries as scenic and intriguing places to visit. One person responded, “How long do you have? . . . We go . . . for a hike, we go for a bike ride, we go snowshoeing or cross-country skiing, we go from my house or from somebody else’s house, right out the back door. There’s old farm roads and trails . . . bear tracks all over the place, everywhere.”

One respondent who has lived in town less than 10 years and commutes out of town for work identified – exclusively – places of business in the community where she can access amenities or see other people in town and socialize, such as banks, stores, and restaurants. Another respondent, a medium-length business owner who did not own acreage, mentioned only showing out-of-town guests certain significant built features to the town such as the covered bridge and an unusual library within the community. One other person, a lifetime resident, had difficulty pinpointing any place in particular: “Wouldn’t want to live in any other town, so there has to be something.”

The preponderance of significant places named that related to recreation and the outdoors rather than cultural and built elements may suggest that the respondents place a high value on the
accessible outdoor amenities available to them, but also may be that the question was interpreted as seeking those particular types of responses. Still, it can be surmised that there is a measurable level of attachment that these participants have for their rural landscape and its considerable recreational amenities.

**Places to Relax/Reduce Stress**

To further investigate the role that local places played in people’s lives, a question was asked about places that people might go to relax or reduce stress. The majority of places identified duplicated responses to the previous question on significant places, but in general respondents had a harder time pinpointing places they go specifically to relax. Three people pointed out the ability to leave directly from their homes to walk, bike, or ski on either their own or nearby properties. This supports a similar statement made by another respondent in the previous question. One lifetime resident couldn’t think of anywhere he would specifically go now, but did remark, “I can remember when I was a kid, the woods, the brook usually appealed to me. That would be the place I’d head for.”

The difficulty people had in responding to this question very much beyond the previous question may indicate some level of confusion as to the differences of intent between the questions. Respondents may automatically associate places of personal significance with places that they found relaxing or stress-reducing, or may have never particularly connected the idea of stress reduction with places they like to frequent.

**Rural Perceptions and Values**

**Perceptions of the Rural Landscape**

This group of questions was intended to bring about a more theoretical understanding of how people conceive of the rural landscape. These questions sought to gain a larger perspective on the thoughts participants have on rural landscapes, and did not include the personal nature of their connections explored in the previous section. Two questions were designed to find out how the respondents personally define or describe the concept of ‘rural’. Another question was asked on what respondents believed was the general appeal of a rural place, with the intent to gather more information about how respondents conceived of the rural environment. Finally a question was
presented on whether respondents believed that people generally found rural places to be healthier or less stressful than other places.

What Makes a Place Rural?

A question was asked to initially gain an overall definition of what makes a place rural by collecting instinctive reactions to the word ‘rural’. Seven of the 10 respondents (70%) described ‘rural’ in part by characterizing the greater distance between houses than is found in other places, or perceiving the houses as less visible. Four of the 10 respondents (40%) specifically mentioned fewer people or lower population density, including two that had not mentioned development density. This result points to an agreement by 9 of the 10 respondents that a rural place is rural because of a perceived or actual lack of people and/or houses. In their minds this lack distinguishes their communities from a suburban or urban place.

Interestingly, all 10 respondents at least in part defined ‘rural’ by what was missing or what it was not, such as not a city, or that there were not a lot of people, traffic lights, signs, or neighborhoods. One person stated that rural meant “not being able to see more than one neighbor off the front porch.” Another respondent said that it used to be defined simply as “the opposite of urban,” but this was prior to the advent of suburbia. He explained that ‘rural’ also once meant earning one’s livelihood from farming, but now it means a location that is scarcely populated and in which the majority of residents are commuters.

Two people pointed out that it depends on the background or location of the person responding. One of these respondents described ‘rural’ as a state of mind, and that for someone in another state in the Midwest, “It means, well, I can drive my tractor in a straight line all day and not come to the edge of my field.” Another respondent explained that, for some people, suburbia is considered ‘rural’, although she herself did not see it that way. Also she noted that in this region of the country one could say the presence of woods defines ‘rural’, but people from other places might believe differently.

In this question, seven respondents mentioned farms or agriculture in their descriptions of what makes a place rural; of these, four also cited fields and three mentioned forest or woodlands. Three respondents used the term ‘open space’ or ‘open lands,’ in one instance in conjunction with the mention of ‘forest’ and a second instance also pointed to ‘agriculture.’ Ultimately eight people
mentioned at least one of these physical attributes. The two people who did not were both recent transplants within the past ten years, were not in land-based occupations, and owned less than 5 acres of land. See Table I for a breakdown of these responses.

These results indicate that the idea of ‘rural’ appears to be strongly based in a perception of low-density housing, few people, and a place that stands in contrast to the city and its problems. Secondarily people seemed to identify physical characteristics of the land associated with ‘rural’, although only minimally referred to the presence of a working landscape.

Table I

Pattern of responses for landscape types that characterize a rural place.

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<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Agriculture: Farms</th>
<th>Pastures &amp; Crops</th>
<th>Fields</th>
<th>Forests &amp; Woodlands</th>
<th>Open Space &amp; Land (broadly defined)</th>
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**Dark gray** = initial response  **Light gray** = follow-up response  **No shading** = no response

Unique Visual Attributes

“Rural space and rural lifestyle is very sacred. The lifestyle lends itself to connection to the earth; you garden, you farm, you’re a forester, you log, you have chickens maybe, maybe you have two goats, maybe you don’t have animals in that way . . . probably you have at least a cat or dog or multiples. I barely know anyone rurally who doesn’t have an animal.”

- interview respondent

This question, intended as a follow-up to the previous one, asked specifically what people expected to see in a rural community, as a way to elicit further responses that may be more visually
based (see Table I). As may be expected, many of these comments overlapped with responses from the initial question, although all respondents except one did expand on their initial comments or specify new ones. The things people expected to see in a rural community that distinguish it from other types of places again included agriculture (one specified economically viable, or “active,” agriculture, which he added was in its “last gasp”), forests, fields, and open lands. One person brought up agriculture that hadn’t in the prior question, so that a total of eight people (80%) between both questions indicated farming as a component of their definition of ‘rural’. This left only the two most recent newcomers (of less than 10 years, non-landowners, and in non-land-based occupations) who did not discuss agriculture. One new person responded with ‘fields’ here, bringing that response to 50%. Four new people mentioned open space or open lands in some way, for a total of seven (70%). One person elaborated in regards to open space, noting that “‘open’ doesn’t have to mean open fields, but undeveloped, un-chopped up, unsegmented land.” One new respondent made mention at all of these particular characteristics, so that only one respondent did not bring up such attributes in response to either question. This person was notable for being a new resident (less than 10 years) who owned less than 5 acres, did not earn a living from the land, and who worked primarily out of town.

Other visual attributes briefly mentioned were scenic views (unspecified), dirt roads (as opposed to the presence of sidewalks), animals, and cultural places that bring people together in community, to include local churches, stores, or festivals. One respondent added that a distinctly rural feature was the presence of road signs that read “thickly settled” upon approaching village centers, indicating the need for traffic to slow down. Only two people discussed buildings (other than residences) or cultural places or events of significance to the rural community. Both of these respondents owned less than 5 acres of land and had lived in town for less than 30 years. One respondent explained that these communities:

Have made it a point to - within the bounds of their town - provide events that are wholesome, whether it’s the Fall Festival or the Summer Strawberry Supper, whatever . . . . Events tied to the seasons and tied to trying to draw out people who might otherwise stay home all the time . . . who need a break from the day, their chores on the farm.

Although the question was intended to elicit responses of a primarily visual nature, four people interpreted what one would “see” as including characteristics that were not necessarily directly observable, but that were very much a part of their rural community. In this sense the responses served to further expand on some of the non-visual concepts elicited in the initial question on the
definition of ‘rural’. For instance, one response by a new resident (less than 10 years) emphasized that in a rural community people know each other. Another, who had been in town closer to 30 years, reinforced her personal concept of rural by pointing to the sacredness of the rural space and lifestyle. The same person also reinforced previous responses that the concept of rural is place-dependent. ‘Rural’ in another part of the country could mean one is 100 miles from the nearest neighbor, while in this part of the country the close connection to people is a prominent feature of a rural lifestyle. One person, who had lifelong ties to the area and whose work was land-based and local, cited his concept of ‘rural’ in part by how it might be represented on a map. He identified state parks or state-owned lands by noting areas of green, suggesting that he particularly associated such lands with rural places. Another respondent, also self-employed in a land-based occupation, noted the prolific cottage industry and the connection between self-employment and the lack of affluence that may characterize the region:

The people who are the poor are what I really think is the fabric of these Hilltowns. Oftentimes they might have a job at UMass or something, but they also have some other little job that allows them to maybe make a little extra, or they might not even make any money at what they’re doing – they might be knitting afghans that they donate to the church.

Rural Appeal

To further reveal the perceptions of the value of living in a rural place that respondents held, a question was asked to find out what residents believe appeals to people about living or working in a rural community. Respondents overall saw this appeal as being characterized by having a slower pace of life, being removed from city problems, enjoying peace and quiet, feeling safer, and being more secluded and away from other people while also feeling connected to community. Overall it did not appear that any significant demographic characteristics drove the responses, all of which seemed to strongly reinforce each other.

Four people specifically cited distance from other people as a primary appeal for living in a rural place. Two people responded that the appeal was physical space or expansiveness, one of whom had not also indicated the distance from people. It was difficult to separate out these responses because of the way people tended to link low population density and the sense of cultural independence to a physical sense of space within which they have freedom to move about and enjoy. For instance, the response that “kids have room to run around and catch snakes” suggests an
abundance of both physical and cultural space. One person explained that “the majority are looking for elbow room that they do not get from development areas,” and in this case it was difficult to determine if they meant physical or cultural space, or quite possibly both.

Three people pointed to the slow pace of the rural lifestyle as a major factor for choosing a rural place to live, and three responded that it was the peacefulness or quietness that was the draw. One mentioned the aesthetic qualities as an appeal and one brought up the sense of community. Safety came up as a factor for three people, and for one respondent this concept included community programs in place in rural towns across the region. For instance, rural towns referred to as “Triad” communities participate in a program where the police make weekly but unobtrusive house calls on the elderly or disabled to make sure they are doing well and are not in need of help. This person also considered how large-lot landowners are the reason the place still manages to stay rural:

Although they might have parceled some of it off over the years, there’s a lot of landowners around here who have huge acreage. They worry about how they’re going to hold onto it and still be able to afford to live in their homes just because of taxes and whatnot, and they may not want to enter their land into any program or conservation restriction and all that.

Reinforcing responses in a previous inquiry, four people specifically referred to the lack of city problems as a primary draw to the rural community, pointing to the busy-ness, violence, noise, and traffic of the city that people wished to escape. All four of these people had moved into the community from elsewhere, and three of the four were residents for less than 30 years, owned less than 5 acres, and did not make their living locally in a land-based profession. The fourth person owned over 20 acres and did operate a local, land-based business, but had moved to the community within the last 30 years. This effectively reinforced the positive qualities that people who may have lived in more urban landscapes came to the countryside to find, such as safety, quietness, and a slower pace of life.

Health and Stress

A question was posed to find out if participants associated the concepts of health or stress to the urban-rural spectrum of community. Reaction to the question of whether rural places are healthier or less stressful than other types of places was mixed. Three of the respondents replied that “yes” they were healthier or less stressful, three others said “for the most part, yes,” but qualified their response with some exceptions, and four people responded that it could go either
way depending on the person and/or situation. None of the respondents replied with a firm “no” or even a mostly negative response. The only significant demographic finding here was that the four that responded “depends” were all residents for less than 30 years, including the two who had lived in town for less than 10 years.

Reasons cited for rural places being ‘healthier’ included less congestion and traffic, a cleaner environment, and a less stressful lifestyle. Reasons that some participants gave for rural areas not being healthier included stress over greater expenses such as gas and higher taxes, greater difficulty accessing healthcare facilities, longer waits for emergency services in town, and just having to drive more in general. One person responded to the idea of a rural place being healthier or less stressful. “[It] could be a myth for all I know…. People from non-rural backgrounds come and get freaked out by the openness. What do you do here?”

Rural Lifestyle and Stress

Finally, a question was asked to ascertain how people felt about the rural lifestyle and its effect on their own personal levels of stress or illness. When asked if their ability to handle stress and illness might be the same or different if they lived in a more urban setting, the response was varied. Three respondents indicated that their ability to handle stress would be pretty much the same no matter where they lived, while five described their reaction to stress as “possibly” or “definitely” different in a more urbanized place. One person could not say one way or the other, but recognized that she chose the rural lifestyle very intentionally and believes this choice has enhanced her life as a whole in ways that she may not even fully realize.

The people who felt they would not likely notice any difference in dealing with stress or illness did not share any demographic similarities other than having lived in the community for less than 30 years. One person who indicated it would be the same qualified this response by saying “I don’t feel stressed out in urban places necessarily, just wouldn’t want to live there.”

Of those respondents who felt there were differences in how they would handle stress and illness in other places, three believed that they would have a harder time handling stress in a more urban setting, while two others felt that living closer to the center of things would reduce some stress associated with rural living, and make handling illness easier as well. The latter two discussed the lack of access to health care services as well as the overall convenience factor that’s missing in
the Hilltowns. Both of these respondents had lived in the community less than 30 years but did not otherwise share demographic similarities.

These results somewhat contradict some of the recent literature in restorative environments, in which a measurable response to more “greenness” such as trees correlated with lowered stress, improvement of mood, and a positive impact on physiological reactions such as blood pressure (Sheets and Manzer 1991; Parsons et al. 1998; Wells 2000). Reasons for this contradiction may be in part because of the difficulty in drawing comparisons between urban or suburban and rural studies. The challenges inherent in attempting to quantify the effects of a broad, rural landscape setting on the health of those who live within it may inhibit adequate research in this area. But a more cogent explanation may be that, in contrast to these other studies, the participants in this case were being asked to self-identify how living in a nature-dominated setting affects their relative state of stress or wellness. The psychological and physiological reactions to environment may perhaps be far more readily obtained in controlled settings where the subject is unaware of the research aims, as was typically the case in these previous studies. Interestingly, the results do reflect similar results in the Halfacree study (1995) in which residents were also asked to self-identify this connection, and also showed a mixed response in what they perceive as the relative healthiness of living in a rural environment.

Perceptions of Rural Land-Based Resources and Economy

This section addresses rural land resources, defined in the interview questionnaire as forests, farming, stone/rock quarries, and open space. These results are intended to support the objectives of understanding the values and preferences people have for various elements of the rural environment.

Value of Rural Land Resources

To understand the values that respondents place on the resources of the rural landscape, they were asked directly what primary importance they placed on these land resources for the region and their specific community. This was followed up with a question about how these factors might make the community a better place, although for some respondents both of these questions were answered together, generating relatively non-distinct responses.
Results indicated that respondents value the environmental benefits of rural land resources, the aesthetic and recreational value of open space and forests, as well as the critical economic opportunities such resources afford the local community. One person emphasized the economic factor, saying “It goes back to question number one, you know, ‘what makes a place rural?’ Well, it’s rural because it has an active farm and forest economy . . . you can’t separate them.”

All respondents brought up either the environmental or economic value of rural land resources, or both. Five total respondents made reference to the environmental value of such resources while seven total people made mention of the economic implications of these resources. Those who were not making a living from the land and who owned smaller parcels were the three respondents who brought up only the environmental value of the land. Only two of the above respondents discussed both, in both cases given by people who were in land-based occupations. One respondent answered:

Lumbering in the Hilltowns is a rural occupation. Forestland is a renewable resource and one of the problems that people who are involved in lumbering is that there’s a certain number of people who have moved into the area that, even though the mill was there, they object to the noise and the traffic.

This respondent went on to discuss the viability and value of the farming industry:

Agriculture could include Christmas tree farms. I think that’s a great use of it [the rural landscape], and also helps to maintain the purity of water supplies and so forth. Dairy farms – it has been very difficult for them to compete with the mega-farms in New York and further to the west with modern-day transportation. . . . But if they can continue, they help to maintain the appearance of a rural area, you know, the open fields. If you do not have a dairy farm, then what happens to those fields? The fields are either grown up to brush, or else they’re divided up into 200 foot lots and sold to people who live in the suburbs, live in a condo, live in the city who want to get out to, there again, have elbow room and open countrysides.

One person expanded on how rural land resources made the community a better place:

For the people who enjoy this kind of environment, it’s priceless to them. Being at the edge of development pressure we have stores that provide jobs for people; sawmills, logging, recreation like the DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution State Park] all provide local employment, either seasonal or full-time.

Four respondents additionally mentioned the aesthetic value of rural land resources while two pointed out their recreational value. The latter were both by individuals in land occupations who had exclusively talked of the economic benefits of land resources. One tied recreation closely to the economic value of such resources because of its power to draw tourists to the region, which, much like agritourism, she felt is becoming lost as the landscape changes. Finally, one person discussed the
importance of private land as an asset to the landowner, offering the perspective of the land as a sometimes necessary private investment:

People want to try to make money off their land, because of the taxes. The taxes have gone up where if they don’t have it in some kind of a program, a tax-deferment program, whether farm or forest - whatever, then people are increasingly alarmed that they just can’t afford to hold onto their land. So the importance of land as an asset is their ability to hold on to at least some of their land by selling off some of the land, so I really think a lot of them look at it as a commodity. Not because they want to but because they’re forced to because of the taxes.

Perceiving Change in Natural Resources

One question sought to capture the respondents’ perceptions of what will happen to natural resources in their town over the upcoming 10-20 years. A strong perception emerged that the things that make the community feel rural are being lost as more housing is being constructed. Significant increases in population were also evident to some according their perceptions of the exploding school populations in some towns and long lines of commuters coming and going.

According to study participants, there is a sense that the quality of rural life is becoming increasingly diminished over the years and is likely to get worse. Comments to this effect included: “The more houses they build the less forests we have” and “Conway is building like crazy... Homes have been built in areas that were once open”; along with a comment that the town is noticing “A lot of farms being cut up for house development, its primary new ‘crop’.”

A sense emerged here that residents believe those coming into town are bringing along their city values and expectations, which will change the face of the community permanently as they turn the town into the place they came from. One summed up this sentiment, saying that newcomers “want different services and they want different things in their town, and other people are on fixed incomes or lower incomes and it can make for a lot of bad feelings.” As another respondent explained:

The old farm way of life is diminishing and in order to maintain that open land which has become extremely valuable, you’re going to have to do something because developers will just come in and grab it, and then we’ll become a suburb... They want what’s best for them, so how are you going to stop them? You have to do it through some kind of regulation, and restrictions on building I guess. But if you put in snob zoning what you do is you end up with a community full of million-dollar houses.

Some interviewees noted that these changes are incremental and sneak up on the town, which has little defense as it is not keeping its bylaws current. Two people mentioned the fragmentation of the land, both of whom worked in land-based occupations. One noted that the past
20 years or so has seen a two- to four-fold increase in population, adding that, while there is still a lot of land left, fragmentation is the greatest challenge which requires better planning. The other said of upcoming changes that they would be “no different than the last 10-20 years; land gets more fragmented. One of the root causes of development is fragmentation. If you don’t break the land up and have more and more owners then you’re not going to end up with more and more houses.”

Two respondents believed that these changes may be temporary, suggesting that mitigating factors may slow down this influx as interest rates increase. These respondents went on to note that the towns are concurrently losing population as the old-timers can no longer afford to live here anymore and are forced to relocate: “The families that have been in town forever are leaving; they’re going back down [out of the Hilltowns]” and “I hear all the time from young people in town, they can’t afford to buy in the town that they’ve lived and been raised in, unless their parents have land to give them.”

One long-time resident talked about how tax increases are forcing elderly and retired landowners to sell off portions of their land, which also has permanent effects on the landscape. Another respondent added “The taxes have just gone up big-time and people are freaking out. Landowners who never thought they’d put their land under Chapter 61 [state tax abatement program] are now rushing to put their land under Chapter 61.”

Finally, one person brought into the conversation future changes related to energy: “So there’s one thing you left out of this thing: energy. . . . What’s going to happen to all those communities that really don’t make that much money? How are they going to pay their mortgage and how are they going to get to work? It’s so central – how Goshen was a small little nucleus. That’s what’s going to happen again, it’s going to have to be small. And jobs and ideas of how to live are going to change a lot. That’s what’s going to happen.”

Rural Economic Viability

To learn more about the value that local residents place on a locally-based economy, questions about how respondents perceive rural economic viability were asked. The majority of respondents were mixed on whether local businesses were economically viable now or in the future, and much of this appeared to be tied to the community in which they resided. Respondents in the most developed town, Williamsburg, perhaps not surprisingly felt that retail and service industries were certainly viable there in the long term. “Legal restrictions have changed over time, farmers have
gotten discouraged because it seems like it’s not agriculture but open space that people want to preserve. [People] don’t care if you’re making food or not. [They want] ‘plywood cows’ instead of real cows.” This same respondent expressed another frustration about working with the land: “In agritourism and recreation there’s the issue of liability; we have to carry liability policy on all land we farm even if we don’t own it, and still we can get sued.”

Residents in Goshen, a much less populated town, discussed the future potential for business and also the existing “hidden” economy in town. One person knew of an auto repair business and a music school, and believed a lot more may be currently going on as a result of computer technology. He also felt that the future was likely to bring a convenience store and gas station just like in Williamsburg. The other responded that local business in Goshen would be economically viable in the future, including:

Small scale manufacturing, possibly, when the pressure of the cost to do business in Northampton and other large population centers force business up into this area. That’s happening in Williamsburg now: small businesses moving in and eventually will move up here because Route 9 is a channel. But it’ll be a long time before you’ll see large-scale business up here – but small ones will happen as people want to get away from the large population centers and bring their businesses up here.

The two Ashfield respondents had significantly different viewpoints than respondents from other towns, enthusiastically pointing to the spectrum of thriving businesses both in the center of town and within people’s homes. One felt business was actually strong across the Hilltowns while the other felt that Ashfield had more success with small businesses than most of the other five communities. Regarding the number of businesses in the region, she noted that:

Ashfield is unusual in that it has a lot, unlike Goshen. They may not be storefront businesses but . . . it’s just uncanny how many people work locally: contractors, landscapers, self-employed handiwork. One deals with large equipment moving in and eventually will do anything from clean out your basement to patch your roof to haul dirt to your property . . . [We have] our own hair salon in town, a couple health care providers, a lot of artisans . . . writers, telecommuters, editors, computer whatever, accountants, all working out of homes or barns . . . along with maybe three remaining farms and the logging industry and a couple car mechanics.

This respondent went on to speculate that “There’s something about Route 9 going right through Goshen, in a blink of an eye it’s over with. Why did nothing evolve there? Some of it is Goshen is not a real welcoming community to new things and change, but Ashfield seems more open in that way and that’s the personality of the community.”
Both Chesterfield residents pointed to a manufacturing facility in their community that they believed was doing well, and a Conway resident mentioned an equipment factory that has been in town a long time and is well-accepted by the community. One Conway resident pointed out that small Main Street businesses have tried unsuccessfully to survive, and could think of only five or six storefront establishments still running in town. The other Conway respondent talked about a hidden infrastructure of hobby businesses that supported each other but did not advertise. People might trade firewood or land services informally with other community members. This respondent also pointed out that the cottage industry has a tough time competing and remaining economically sustainable, including CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture) farmers who have stringent competition in the region due to a surplus of similar farming operations. Both Conway residents spoke of the controversy surrounding a log chipping business that was turned away for fear that it would produce too much traffic and noise.

**Government’s Role in Economic Development**

A question was posed on how respondents perceived the level of support that local government offers local businesses. The responses were mixed, with four people feeling that the local government has been pretty supportive of business and three feeling that local government had been pretty unsupportive. The mostly positive responses reflected respondents who all work locally or whose work is land-based. The negative respondents did not work in local or land-based jobs and had been in the community less than 30 years, two less than 10 years. One could not answer either way, another said it depended primarily on the community reaction, and one other, a lifetime resident with a significant history of local government participation, responded that the government was not particularly supportive or particularly unsupportive: “I haven’t seen a lot of supportive activity on the part of the town. I don’t think they’re discouraging it but I don’t see a lot of support, either. They’re too busy dealing with their day-to-day problems.”

Out of these questions, a common theme emerged that natural resource-based businesses such as sawmills, quarries, logging enterprises, and others that have the greatest capacity for generating conflict with increasingly close neighbors were having the most trouble keeping the support of town government. The perception of the struggle of these traditional land-based rural
economies to stay in business may link strongly to the perceptions of a changing landscape and community that emerged in the earlier discussion on perceiving change in land resources over time.

**Attitudes towards Land Conservation vs. Development**

This final section considers the critical juncture between the pro-development (or anti-regulation) and pro-conservation attitudes that have been expressed in one form or another throughout the interviews. It is intended to address a central objective of this research to better understand how perceptions of the respondents may relate to their attitudes towards the planning practices that may affect their rights as landowners. This section will address the research questions on values and landscape preferences.

**Development vs. Maintaining Rural Character**

One question sought to gain a sense for whether the respondents believed that conservation practices and development activities could be simultaneously pursued. When asked if land development and the maintenance of rural character are compatible goals, four people said it depends on factors such as the type of development and how it is defined. Four others were at least fairly confident that development and rural character were indeed compatible, but expressed caveats like: “but they usually seem to be at odds” and “only if the fragmentation allows for an economical access to the remaining acreage that is supposed to be part of this ruralness.”

Two respondents felt that these goals were mostly not compatible. For instance, the mill operator replied, “I don’t think so... It destroys the rural landscape. On the other hand I’m also aware things don’t stay the same. Sometimes I wish they did.” The dairy farmer responded, “No, I just couldn’t see how it could be compatible; unfortunately may be inevitable. Nobody wants change but things will keep changing, always more people.”

Six people seemed to agree that development was rapidly changing the face of the landscape and that this was a major concern. One respondent felt more flexible zoning could make these goals more compatible. One land-based respondent who said such goals could absolutely be compatible also stated that the biggest threat to this were ANRs (Approval Not Required frontage lots).

Two people mentioned that they have been aware of committees in town trying to address this issue:
There’s a committee formed here in Goshen, I think called the Community Development Committee, dealing with issues of strip development and keeping development confined to areas as opposed to urban sprawl. It’s certainly an effort to preserve the rural character of the town; how well it succeeds remains to be seen.

The other felt that the committee’s role here was important and that the goals of development and preservation were compatible, explaining “Because you can’t stop development, as much as you want to. You can’t stop it. People have the right.”

Government’s Role in Conservation

Three interview questions were asked with the intention of gaining an idea of what people felt was the proper role of government in efforts to keep the community looking rural. The first question attempted to broadly ascertain what respondents felt was the most important approach that government could do to prevent unwanted changes to the visual character of their communities. The follow-up question asked whether government land regulations were necessary or unnecessary in order to maintain this character in the face of future development. The last question focused on local government specifically, and sought respondents’ opinions on the role it should play in regulating the use and development of private land in their communities.

Most Important Approach

Respondents expressed divergent opinions about what the government’s primary role in maintaining rural character should be. Four people mentioned the importance of both adhering to and updating zoning bylaws, with statements such as “every town in Western Mass is probably 10-40 years behind updating bylaws” and “[we need] more frontage requirements for houses. Utilize land like in bigger towns, i.e. flag lots.” One of these respondents also noted the importance of architectural review. Another qualified her response by saying “You have to be very careful about zoning because of snob zoning; a lot of towns are zoning out the trailers or requiring buildings to be on a certain number of acres, [but] there are some regulations in terms of access and roads and back lots and stuff that to a certain degree [are necessary].”

One respondent identified state programs like the APR (Agricultural Preservation Restriction) and the CPA (Community Preservation Act) as “vital” and urged more money to become available for such programs. She felt these were particularly important because they also allowed
for autonomy of local jurisdictions. One land-based respondent asserted that he was “not a big rule and regulation guy” and felt strongly that “community development planning [is] important – educating people about the rural way of life and why it’s important.” He also emphasized the importance of workshops sponsored by HCI [Highland Communities Initiative, a program of The Trustees of Reservations], as well as “a supportive local government, promoting locally based jobs.” He then emphatically remarked, “Ridgeline protection!” as a critical means for safeguarding the quality of the rural experience.

Two other respondents indicated that more funding was needed in general for governments to be effective. One argued that governments should “stop inventing programs with strict controls and give the money straightforward” and the other suggested that the biggest help the government could provide would be through offering tax relief for elderly and retired landowners in town. “It would help relieve burden so they can say ‘I don’t have to sell to the person that’s coming down the road who wants to buy a building lot.’” According to one person, farmland has been unfairly targeted with restrictions, so that people with forested lands have an easier time selling their land for development. She also noted that giving proper compensation was only way for government to direct what a landowner can or cannot do with their land: “To be fair there has to be financial compensation; if people want the land to look a certain way they have to realize the land is an investment for retirement.”

The forester, having worked with landowners and government programs for over 20 years in the community, shared some insights gleaned from this experience:

I think that government ought to stop inventing these programs where there’s really strict controls on certain things and just give the money just for the more simple benefits. There’s a lot of cumbersomeness to a lot of government programs. . . . It costs an awful lot of money to run these programs and a lot of it just ends up just being make-work programs because there’s so much hassle attached to getting this funding, whether it’s cost-share funding or outright funding for something, that a lot of the more savvy landowners around here, they just don’t bother. After the first experience or two, they don’t bother; it’s just not worth the hassle. And sometimes it’s just easier for them to fragment their land, sell off to a developer because it’s just quicker, it’s a quicker turnover. . . .

There’s still a lot of anti-government intrusion attitude around here. And I don’t know whether that’s a bad thing. I work with a lot of programs where I make people fill out a lot of paperwork and end up doing a lot of the paperwork myself and then they review and sign if they want to or whatever, because it’s just so cumbersome, even some of the simplest forms that shouldn’t be cumbersome are. The government has a way of making things so damn complicated.
Regulations Necessary?

Overall seven respondents expressed that government regulations were necessary in maintaining rural character, although two of these people admitted antipathy towards such regulations. One stated, “Of course they are [necessary], because you have the extreme of what’s good for the individual and what’s good for the whole, and private land rights is a whole movement in and of itself. That gets very, very tricky.” Two people who worked locally were uncertain of the necessity of government regulations related to land conservation. One business owner explained, “I’d like to say it wasn’t necessary but I’m not so sure. The main thing is some of the purchases by the state and federal governments takes land off the tax rolls and are stingy about paying back the town money in lieu of taxes. The town can’t meet expenses that way.” The other, a farmer, didn’t feel like she knew enough about them to say one way or another, but expressed that it “kind of seems like there has to be regulations, but usually we always argue against regulations.” None of the participants expressed that regulations were unnecessary.

Local Government’s Role

Regarding the specific role of local town government in regulating private land, respondents had an array of responses about what this role might be. The dairy farmer stated:

We’re all too independent and it’s hard for people to think of change. It takes a really long time to put fair regulations in place and by then it might be too late…. There might have to be some restrictions but compensation is the only way people could accept that…. People don’t always have noble views on land preservation.

Another respondent, also with a land-based business, replied:

That’s a tough one! Well you need some zoning bylaws that are updated, and some long-range open space plans and rural road plans, all this kind of stuff, and then after that, I think it’s pretty much hands-off. You hear me rant and rave about inappropriate architectural styles for rural New England, but would I be in favor of an architectural review committee? Absolutely not. That’s right up there with the government spying on us.…. 

Educate them, try to make them understand, the role of the community is to educate rather than government regulating. Educate, communicate, get them to understand what life in a rural community is about.

A few respondents suggested tax breaks or other financial incentives to ease the burden on landowners or to pave the way for greater utilization of Chapter 61. One recent resident expressed the importance of listening to the community more carefully, “and not go off on their own ideas…. 
The government should be listening to the public more. They say they do but it seems like they could do more.

Two people emphasized how the government is “us,” made up of the people who live in town, so that as the demographic is changing so is the face of local government. As newcomers move in with lots of money and new ideas, they get involved in government and bring unwanted changes to the town in the form of conveniences, often infuriating the long-time residents who have less clout and are on limited incomes:

The big joke is they come to town for a reason and then immediately try to change the town to what they just came from. . . . They want new granite curbing, street lights. . . . The locals are not happy with what they’ve seen happening to Conway, but these people are on that committee and it makes me nervous as to what they’ll do: vote out small acre plots, vote out anybody having a trailer because it’s not their image of [the town]; million dollar homes here [are] hidden up in the hills. [This] has become a bedroom community. . . . Now the town empties out at 7:00 a.m. Amherst, Northampton, Springfield are all accessible; we’ve been discovered.

Another respondent went on to offer some practical advice for newcomers:

Local government: ‘for the people, by the people, of the people.’ It all comes down to the people and what they decide. When moving into [town] a person should go to Town Hall and find out what the rules and regulations are and what they expect you to abide by, because what you see and what you get might be two different things. . . . You think you can change things but it takes a majority. So you need to go in knowing what exists and that you can live with it. The newcomers come and want to bring their new ways there and there’s a big rift from old to new. The overthrowing of the old is slowly happening.

Only two respondents voiced any personal experiences with land-use regulations. One participant was upset that wetlands laws prevent full access to his own property, which has been in the family for generations and on which he pays good taxes. Another felt that not being able to put up a shed on her own property without having to pay fees was unfair, given the property taxes she already must pay.

Landowners’ Role in Conservation

Two questions were asked to uncover how respondents generally perceive the role of the landowner in preserving rural character. One theme that emerged, based on four responses (40%), was that landowners should not sell their land to developers if they want to do their part in retaining rural character. One respondent advised “hanging onto it and not selling it off to make money” and
another felt that one should “not sell your hundred acres to a developer I guess.” Another concurred, “Well don’t sell off lots of your land,” but went on to say:

It’d be great if everybody could understand the true meaning of life in the country. We all talk about it but nobody can put their finger on it, they just know it when they feel it. . . . It would be good if landowners understood some of the history and culture of the rural area in which they live.

One other person shared a similar sentiment, suggesting that landowners need to have sensitivity to the agricultural context of the community as they make decisions regarding the future of their properties.

Another theme, brought up by four respondents, was that homeowners need to maintain their properties by keeping brush cleared, mowing, and thinning woodlands. They stressed that landowners should take pride in keeping their land scenic. One of these respondents added that the landowner should “pay his taxes.” Another suggested it was best not to “put up too many structures on your lot.”

One person felt that the most important responsibility of landowners was to “just be involved in what’s going on in their towns.” A local business owner saw the environmental aspect as the greatest responsibility, saying “Well I don’t think we have to mow these palatial lawns, we certainly should not be fertilizing and weed-killing to a heavy extent. . . . People talk about bird habitat and wildlife habitat so whether you have two acres or 200 acres, those are things one can be conscious of.” Only one person mentioned conservation restrictions (CRs) as an option that landowners could consider.

To expand on his view on the landowner’s role in preservation of rural character, one respondent talked about how to reach landowners who are making key decisions on the future of their properties:

To pose it another way to every new landowner: ‘You just moved in, we’re going to lock the door behind you. Is that okay with you and why?’ So I think that’s education about what is rural character and why it’s important and what we can do to maintain it.

I think the town can play a role; they just formed an ag commission in Ashfield, they plan to have an information sheet about the farm and forest economy of the town of Ashfield so people are forewarned about roosters crowing, spreading manure, spraying apple orchards. That vehicle is an opportunity to educate landowners, an uphill battle against the Yankee attitude of ‘it’s my land, no one’s going to tell me what to do with it.’

Aside from this last point made, the issue over personal property rights did not otherwise emerge as a response here, but this may be because only four people even made mention of large
lot owners selling off land for development, and perhaps also because questions specifically about
government regulations evoked a more direct response about private property and landowners’
rights.

**Land Conservation Programs**

Interviewees were asked a couple of questions to gain a greater understanding of how rural
residents perceive both government and private land conservation programs. The first question was
designed to find out whether respondents felt voluntary land conservation programs were effective
or ineffective in helping to keep their communities looking and feeling rural in the long term. Later
in the interview the participants were asked in what ways they felt land conservation programs (both
voluntary and regulatory) impact rural character.

**Voluntary Programs**

Only six direct responses were collected on this question. When asked whether voluntary
conservation programs are likely to be effective in helping to maintain rural character, respondents
struggled in coming up with answers. The most positive response came from the dairy farmer, who
said “I've noticed it's a good thing, oftentimes land trusts are more effective because they can act quicker;”
and later concluded that “Land trusts seem to be a really good option.”

Four people had fairly mixed reactions, some of whom seemed unfamiliar with such
programs or had some confusion about the question. “I'm sure they'd be effective but I don't think
you'd get many people to do it, but I don't know. I've never really seen it. I think it's something they'd have
to be paid to do.” Another respondent said “For those of us who have the time, sure. Have to have the
time to be involved and do what you think is necessary. Most people don't have time these days.” The
other two respondents named specific cooperative programs and showed more familiarity with how
they operate, but did not demonstrate a lot of faith in their effectiveness. One talked about why
people might or might not get involved in conservation programs for their land:

> Well they do put it into Chapter 61, but that's just to get out of taxes, not a permanent thing. But
I understand if someone owns 100 acres and it's valuable land and worth some money to them. I
hate to say it because it's beautiful pristine farmland and the sad thing is once you lose farmland
it's lost forever. The Connecticut Valley has some of the best farmland in the country that's being
developed which is sad to see but I can understand the landowner's point of view, too. They're not
going to farm it anymore; too hard, not profitable. So it's tough.
One respondent seemed to feel these programs would be ineffective over time, saying “I don’t see it, no. You see new people moving in and bringing city values with them.” To illustrate, this respondent added that they knew of someone who had just moved into town and was “upset about his taxes because the town didn’t provide services. He’s used to services he got in the city. He came here because he liked the character of the town but wanted to bring the city with him.”

Impact of Conservation Programs

Participants were asked how they felt that conservation programs of all types generally impact rural character and community. One overall comment reflected the respondent’s own willingness to play a part in conservation:

I want to always be able to drive around these roads and be able to look at the bucolic views. And I am willing, as I said before, to . . . maybe perhaps pay a little extra something in some way, shape, or form, whether through taxation or whatever, to help offset the cost so that those people will still own it. And I think more people ought to be willing, really, to put their money where their mouth is.

Of the six respondents who brought up state programs, two who were in land-based occupations felt that such programs were somewhat positively impacting rural character. One of these, a lifelong resident, responded “Well, most of them improve it . . . About the only thing that is a concern is the fact that this area that the state has acquired, they have not reimbursed the town in lieu of taxes that they have acquired,” explaining that “It increases the burden on everyone else.” The other felt that “Massachusetts does pretty well considering budget constraints. Ag programs that help out, APR, all a matter of money. When states don’t have any money there’s no land conservation, whether it’s Arizona or Maine.” Three others had a mixed or unsure response: “Depends on what the state government wants to do with [the land]. . . . They’re not conserving it, I don’t think.” One very strongly felt the state was not being effective in impacting rural character: “My experience with the state is it doesn’t. It comes down with these regulations.” In regards to such regulations, this person described the attitude of the state as “you follow them or we’re going to squash you. Basically we don’t care.”

Six people answered the question at the local government level, two of whom described the efforts as somewhat positively impacting rural character, saying “If our zoning laws weren’t so restrictive, we’d have twice as many houses” and “I don’t think a Wal-Mart could come into Chesterfield so there must be a bylaw for that.” Three were mixed in response: “It’s a fine balance to protect and
preserve, but also the people's rights come in there somewhere and the middle ground is very iffy. Well, the town might be more likely [than the state] to find a middle ground.” One person expressed a fairly negative view of town-level programs and efforts:

Local government? Local’s a tough one. Land conservation programs in local town governments don’t happen until a critical mass of people have come into the community . . . only then will local government do anything. You don’t find programs in what I call rural communities, you find them in Belchertown or Amherst or Walpole or west of 495 along the 91 corridor where all of a sudden in my mind it’s too late. Incremental fragmentation – I grew up with it so I can identify it. Not everyone can. It sneaks up and people suddenly realize.

In this question, programs run by land trusts or other private organizations seemed to score higher than both the state and local government programs, although only four people directly addressed them. One respondent who mentioned a private organization explained his mixed feelings regarding programs of any level or type, stressing the dilemma of land preservation vs. landowner rights:

People that would leave their land to the Audubon Society or to the town with a specific use in mind is important; how you can get people to get away from the fact that their investment is worth so much because of the potential building sites on it, I don’t know what you could do because when it comes down to push and shove, we all retire and we all need money. Who’s going to undervalue property that might be worth more because of the building lots on it? You’ve got a small amount of people that can conserve and those are the people that you really have to target.

Another response was fairly positive: “I’ve seen instances where the local land trust has bought land to stop them from developing up here on 116 . . . I don’t have any problem with that.” Two others expressed very positive reactions towards land trusts. One person cited organizations like the Hilltown Land Trust and The Trustees of Reservations (TTOR) as positively impacting the landscape. The other fully affirmed the effectiveness of land trusts as well:

[Land trusts have a] huge impact, no question about it. On a community basis there are all the local land trusts: Franklin, Deerfield, Mount Grace, Hilltown, etc., and they’re critical, they all do great work. Next larger scale, The Trustees of Reservation in Massachusetts, then larger scale, Audubon, for example, owns a lot of land in Plainfield here, Nature Conservancy lands and so forth.

Still, respondents felt that many residents become frustrated with the conservation commission or even with voluntary programs like Chapter 61 that impact the local tax base. “Conway is probably one of the heaviest taxed towns in the area . . . They see that land is being taken off the tax rolls, and . . . there go our taxes.” They also point to the sentiment that such programs interfere with landowners’ rights. One person, a medium-term resident, explained:
I work in a business where I get a lot of blue-collar and low-income people in here, so I hear the grousing. Well, I mean, there's a real strong Yankee, you know 'damn it, they're not going to tell me what to do with my land' kind of attitude. . . .

[People say] 'It's my land, it's been my land,' and you know these people come in here and the conservation commission is particularly on the s__t list. You know, you try to do something and they come in here and they find a fern and you're screwed. Or a spotted lizard or something and they just go crazy, they go bonkers. And they can't do anything, and I can understand their frustration. But at the same time, you know, I don't want people destroying land. It's like anything the government plans . . . the basic idea's often good but they take it to an extreme. They go off the deep end. I see that over and over again.

One respondent, hearkening back to the idea of local government being intrinsic to the community, talked in greater detail about local programs:

Local governments are grassroots politics, volunteer towns and boards, so local governments are as good an example as you can get of people in town. The tone of local government changes as the makeup of the town changes; as the makeup of the town changes, rural character changes. So thoughts on rural development and what makes a town rural and what is a rural community and opinion of local government changes over the years as more people arrive and get involved in local government.

Why [did we have] no ag commissions before? No need, everyone knew about rural community, had farmers on local government boards that drove politics. But as towns drift further away from a farm and forest economy, people involved in cons com [conservation commissions] are much more strict about gray areas. New people don't understand that what makes land what it is, is what it's been: a farm and forest-based economy.

Receptivity to Various Agencies

To explore in greater depth the attitudes respondents have towards programs from different agencies, one question was designed to assess the respondents’ comparative levels of trust for state and local governments, as well as private, not-for-profit organizations engaged in conservation efforts. The respondents were invited to discuss both regulatory and cooperative efforts in their replies. Respondents were also asked whether they had personal experience working with such programs. If so, they were asked what that experience was like; if not, they were asked what they may have heard from others about their experiences. Lastly, those who owned acreage were asked what, if any, programs they may have considered for the management of their own land.

Five respondents (50%) identified land trusts as the agencies to which they were most receptive in comparison to either local government, state government, or both. They cited reasons such as the stronger connection to community (particularly compared to the state), the sense that representatives of land trusts often lived locally and were invested in the community’s betterment,
the great effort they put into organizing local events for fundraising, and the fact that they often work on a voluntary basis.

Four people (40%) discussed the local government in comparison with either the state or land trusts. One respondent felt about equally positive about both local government and land trusts but expressed a very negative reaction to the state. Another, who exhibited a mixed response on both state and local government, did acknowledge that one had a much greater voice locally than at the state level. “You have some power in a town meeting; you know, the local people actually just scream and yell and our selectmen will listen.” A third person expressed uncertainty about the role of local government, but in comparison felt good about working with an organization like the Franklin County Land Trust while expressing relative suspicion about state and federal government. Finally, one person couched her response in terms of what entity she would be comfortable donating to for conservation purposes: “I would be more apt to give to The Trustees of Reservation than I would to any other state organization. Dealing with the town would mean a lot more than dealing with someone who doesn’t know Chesterfield.” One person elaborated on local government and government in general, bringing up a previously made point about the government being the people of the town:

You have to ask who “them” is. “Them” is actually “us.” Because there is no mayor or anybody that’s really – you can look at the board of assessors, you can look at the conservation commission, you can look at, oh, the board of health. Those are just boards that are filled by local people that are trying to maintain some sort of integrity to the town bylaws. So there’s not “they,” it’s “us.”

When people talk about “the” government . . . you’ve alienated yourself from your own country because we are the government. We have to take responsibility for the good and bad decisions that are made. You can’t just own the wins, you’ve got to own the losses, too.

Four respondents (40%) expressed a lack of confidence with state-level initiatives, although one person who indicated a mostly negative response qualified that “the state does have money to help out [with preservation efforts].” Two others were rather mixed: “I don’t know. I’ve been a little bit suspicious of some of the state-owned ones” and “Governments have so many regulations and legal restrictions they have to follow; can’t be as flexible; takes them longer to do things, get money approved.

When something has to happen with land it has to often happen quickly.”

One person talked about common perceptions some people have of both the state government and land trusts, that he seemed to suggest may be misconceptions:

A lot of people have no use whatsoever for organizations that lock up land, take [land] off tax rolls, not let them hunt or fish. . . . ‘Elitist snobs from Boston coming out, buying up all the land,
taking it off tax rolls. Land trusts? Don’t trust them, in business to make money. State? Don’t trust the state at all. Other more enlightened people realize we’ve reached critical mass and have to do something now and educate.

Only two of the respondents cited any experience with conservation programs. One person described the nature of his experience, as well as further thoughts on programs like Chapter 61:

That was a positive one, because most of the programs I think help in some ways, like Chapter 61. People buy into that but when you look at the separation of say the house from the land . . . It’s not a big savings, it’s not a huge thing, and unless you continue it you have to pay all that back at the end of the time when you take it out . . . but when the state goes out and buys out a whole area, that’s where it’s really helped because it’s not going to change and they’ve allocated funds for preserving that whole area.

The other respondent, the forester, did not personally have experience from the perspective of landowner, but was professionally involved in helping others manage their land and the concomitant decisions involved. Five people knew of others who had personal experiences with such programs. One respondent noted:

Well a lot of people object to the restrictions that are put on them, in the Chapters. Some people just don’t want the state meddling in their affairs at all. They just don’t want to get into any state- or government-administered program where the government can tell them what they can or can’t do. These are the old rock-ribbed Yankees up in the Hilltowns. . . . It’s just an aversion on the part of people to government control of any sort.

Finally, three people talked about the future management of their own land. One respondent has considered Chapter 61 or talking to The Trustees of Reservations, but did not elaborate on either option. One individual who owns and makes a living from his land has it in Chapter 61. He said he had no interest in developing it, but eventually wants to pass it and the business on to his son. Another is considering Chapter 61 for his forest land. He currently has his land in Chapter 61A, which, as he summed up, “allows for conservation of natural resources. That Chapter is misunderstood because there are really two parts to it: recreational and conservation. So you can qualify as either recreational land or conservation. I’m happy. Reduces my taxes with a minimum of interference.”

The responses given here indicate a prevailing attitude of distrust and antipathy towards government programs and regulations, but most particularly directed towards state-level government, an entity made up of people that participants view as strangers who do not know or care what the community really needs. While an ambivalent attitude reigned over local governments as well, it was recognized here as in other places in the interview that the local government in large part reflected the local people, effectively meaning those government members were not considered strangers.
Since quite literally these people do for the most part know each other, this particular finding is not one that would necessarily translate to a non-rural community, and serves as an indirect commentary on another facet of what seems to define a rural community. Land trusts were highly regarded, particularly in comparison to local and state governments. In particular the local organizations were afforded participants’ trust because of the community connection that the people who represent these organizations have. Results clearly indicate an order of preference for working with local land trusts first, then local government, and lastly state and/or federal levels of government.

Conclusions

In exploring the attachment to place within these five rural communities, the interviews elucidated a strong gravitation towards living in a town in which people know each other and yet have plenty of physical space and privacy. People saw in these towns an escape from perceived problems that come with living too close together in numbers too great to foster a sense of security and familiarity. Despite this finding, a striking minority of people actually moved to these towns specifically seeking a rural lifestyle. Those who did were recent transplants, were not engaged in land-based work, and who owned minimal acreage. Of significance in these communities were the natural and recreational opportunities that were afforded its residents, and, to a lesser degree, cultural features or events within their towns. Respondents overwhelmingly defined ‘rural’ by observing the greater distance between, and reduced number of, homes and people, and universally identified ‘rural’ as exemplifying those things that a city is not. Only half of the respondents initially associated ‘rural’ with farms or agriculture, although in a follow-up question this number rose by two, to reach 70%. The majority of interviewees responded that rural communities were definitely or somewhat healthier or less stressful places to live, while the rest remained neutral. Nobody felt that rural towns were overwhelmingly less healthy places to be. A mixed reply followed queries about the respondents’ ability to handle stress more readily in a rural setting.

The value placed on rural land resources was characterized as environmental and/or economic. Aesthetic and recreational value was secondarily noted, and land as a private investment or asset represented a minority viewpoint. All respondents felt that the natural resources of their communities would be vulnerable to changes within a decade or two, with some differing opinion on whether the changes to come would be temporary or permanent. Also mixed was the response to the
economic viability of a rural economy. Some could readily see small, mutually supportive businesses thrive in the long-term, and others could not imagine anything coming in beyond what already existed. Nobody seemed to envision a future of big business moving in. Local government was seen by some as a facilitator to local business and by others as an impediment. A few respondents felt local government had a neutral impact.

Respondents were mixed in whether they believed preservation and development were compatible goals. Only two felt that these goals were primarily incompatible. In terms of government’s role in preserving the character of the Hilltowns, responses were also mixed, with some hesitance about how and where the government could or should appropriately intervene. All of the respondents conceded to some extent that regulations are a necessary, if not exactly ideal, component of keeping treasured lands out of development. None argued for an abolishment of such regulations. Most respondents were also mixed in identifying what the local government could do to stem the flood of development. While they exhibited some recognition that the local government was reflective of the community itself, they again revealed a wariness of too much government interference, even on the local level. Respondents felt that the responsibility of the landowner in preserving the local character of the town ranged from not selling to developers, to being aware of the context and history of their lands, to taking good care of their properties.

Voluntary involvement with various land conservation programs did not evoke a marked response from those who answered. When asked directly about the overall impact of such programs, a third of those who responded did feel that their existence is generally an asset to preservation efforts, with a minority expressing a strongly negative reaction. The level of trust people had for government was higher for local and lower for state or federal, while their trust for private conservation organizations tended to exceed their faith in any government program at all.

Clearly, the above shows a strong preference for the amenities that a rural lifestyle has to offer, most notably the absence of excessive amounts of houses, cars, and people. Simultaneously, people are hesitant and uncertain about how to maintain the quality of life they value in their respective communities. They largely do not trust the government to look out for their interests, and have had generally little exposure to private organizations such as land trusts. They clearly see the problems that lay ahead for their communities but do not know of adequate measures that can be taken by themselves or their neighbors to contribute positively to the longevity of the character
and culture of their towns. The next chapter, Discussion, will explore and analyze some of these response trends, and the final chapter, Implications and Reflections, will point to some potential implications that the responses described herein may be suggesting for a variety of stakeholders.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION

Determining the ways in which the interview responses reflected or contradicted the current literature and previous survey results depends largely on understanding what demographic factors, if any, can predict the outcomes of responses by interviewees. In this research, the small sample size and voluminous data increase the challenge for drawing neat conclusions about elements of the sample population. Even given the qualitative nature of the data collected, the research is made stronger by the analysis of these demographic predictors to the greatest extent possible. Still, the demographic variables are best viewed with some degree of caution to avoid relying too heavily on these outcomes as compared to previous studies. Regardless of the strength of association between demographics and responses, it is hoped that the quotation-rich text of the Results chapter and this forthcoming discussion will provide a secondary source of valuable information for the local communities affected directly by the study as well as for a larger context of professionals and researchers involved in rural planning.

Summary of Research Findings

In Chapter III, Project Description, three questions were formulated to support the goals and objectives of this research, and to serve as a central guide for the direction of the interviews. While some additional and significant themes emerged in the course of research (addressed in the next section, Emergent Themes), the original three questions are first considered here in light of the interview responses that were collected.
What are some underlying values that contribute to the attachment or attraction a person may have for the character of rural places (i.e. visual characteristics, emotional bonds, restorative functions)?

The study results suggest several operative motivators for the draw of rural places. First, the study suggests that people seek out rural character for social reasons, in the belief that a small town lifestyle may well foster a sense of belonging to a community. Interestingly, the literature both supports and denies the concept of a greater social connectedness in a rural setting. According to Halfacree (1995), a majority of respondents in his study reported ‘community’ in connection with their concept of rural, but a significant response showed that an equal sense of loneliness pervades the rural experience. Respondents identified factors such as the ‘clique’ mentality, the ease of choosing isolation over involvement, and the tendency for community connections to be more readily apparent to older and retired residents who have the time to spend in social pursuits. Dubbink (1984) also put forth the idea of loneliness outside the urban realm: “The medium-rural towns, with their elaborate defenses against intrusion, show a contrary tendency toward purification and exclusion.”

A second motivator for seeking out the rural landscape may be labeled as the desire to fulfill aesthetic and recreational proclivities. While such pursuits may be seen as auxiliary to basic human drives, in view of attachment to landscape both the need to view and interact with the “great outdoors” is amply supported by the literature. Returning to the existing research as covered in Chapter II, benefits of restorative environments include encouraging physical activity, promoting mental focus, and stabilizing moods (Kaplan 1995; Kaplan, Kaplan, and Ryan 1998; Clay 2001; Herzog 1997). Although this study attempted to gather qualitative data on some of these factors, it has failed in drawing significant conclusions. This may be in part because research constraints allowed for little time in addressing this theme and in part because the questions may have not been effectively posed to gain solid insights in this regard. The raw data may yet be usable to spark a more in-depth inquiry into the attitudes and beliefs surrounding the restorative value of landscapes.

The third apparent motivating draw to rural places was a desire for peace, quiet, and space to spread out. This theme emerged repeatedly from those who moved to the rural setting from other types of places. Hand in hand with this was the expressed need to escape the dangers and frustrations of living in a comparatively urban place. The theme of movement toward safety and away from conflict or danger was the dual sentiment expressed almost simultaneously by several
participants. In describing the “good” elements that one expected to find in the rural community, the keywords used were nearly synonymous in the participants’ views. This also went for the “bad” elements that made up urban living. For instance, terms such as crime, population density, noise, and pollution were expressed or implied as interchangeable in describing places considered more urban than the study area. Likewise, the concepts of space, peace and quiet, relaxation, and safety were also used interchangeably in describing country living. But there is a fine line between the places that space-seeking urbanites might view as ideal and those they would find insufferably boring or isolated, as respondents reported to Dubbink in his 1984 study, although this was only alluded to by one respondent in the present case. In addition, some are quick to point out the inherent dangers and hazards of living in the remote countryside, as Halfacree found in 1995. In the present study, responses centered mostly on problematic access to emergency or routine health care, but otherwise people commonly associated rural living with a deep sense of refuge from the ills of modern society.

2. Are there certain types of rural landscapes that people prefer over others and would therefore be more likely to form attachments to based primarily on their visual characteristics?

The results did not indicate that any particular landscape type was strongly favored over others, although some preferences were exhibited, such as a greater draw to natural areas over agricultural areas. The agricultural appearance of rural communities seemed to be a given in the minds of some respondents, and also in the minds of other community members or tourists that they talked to. As observed by a respondent whose livelihood depended on agricultural viability, people don’t typically realize what keeping landscape views open entails. Neighbors moving in who express a desire to see open fields may simultaneously be bothered by the activities that are required to keep the fields open. Without a strong educational component in the community, a few respondents particularly noted, this scenario may create a great potential for conflict.

Often the respondents alluded to being drawn to a strong sense of spaciousness inherent in the rural landscape. They liked not living too close to neighbors, citing neighbor distance and lack of crowding as desirable qualities of a rural place. Both of these factors could play a significant role in motivating the desire of residents to preserve the open landscapes of their communities.

In general, the newer interview respondents tended to be drawn to cultural (i.e. town centers and buildings) and social elements of the town. Given the sample size and the low representation
of people who’d recently moved into town, this conclusion is not a strong one, but this trend did appear nevertheless. This represents a surprising contradiction to the outcomes that Lokocz (2005) encountered in surveying a statistically significant number of Conway residents, where it was the longest-standing residents who showed the greatest attachment to the town’s cultural features.

3. To what extent do the perceptions people have of the rural landscape inform or predict their attitudes regarding land preservation and development?

According to the interview results, the correlation here appears to be fairly weak. No clear pattern emerges to suggest that a closer tie to the land would indicate a greater openness to exploring methods of preservation, for instance. Rather, the results support the findings of both Walker (2003) and Lokocz (2005), in which medium- to long-time residents are strongly attached to their private property rights while simultaneously being attached to the rural landscapes in which they live. While counterintuitive, this finding is not especially surprising, as it represents the core dilemma that is encountered by all who have a hand in making decisions about the future of rural landscapes.

**Emergent Themes**

This section looks at the themes that arose directly from the interviews themselves. Serving as an alternate lens through which to view the body of interview outcomes, these themes were suggested by an underlying and persistent series of attitudes woven throughout the various topics discussed. It is hoped that this additional framework of attitudes will provide an enriching, if potentially overlapping, set of perspectives to the ones already identified and discussed above.

**Pervasive Trend of Insider vs. Outsider**

Throughout the interviews, a theme arose based on how much an individual or entity is perceived as an “insider” or an “outsider” to the community. Those who don't belong are viewed with a higher degree of suspicion depending on a range of factors. At the individual or private level, residents seem to be measured based on length of residence and type of work (i.e. farmers vs. non-farmers). At the public level, organizations such as land trusts and government agencies (and here ‘public’ refers not to an organization’s funding status but to its visibility as an entity) tend to be judged by their relative proximity to the town. The level of participants’ trust or mistrust can be
represented on a continuum in each group, with increasing trust placed on the more “insider” end of the spectrum, and higher suspicion and wariness towards the “outsider” end. In addition, this relative measure of suspicion can be viewed on a similar but independent spectrum between private (individual) and public (organizational) realms.

Table II

Private-public, insider-outsider continuum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private: Individual Residents</th>
<th>“Insiders”</th>
<th>“Outsiders”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old-timers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Newcomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-farmers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public: Agencies / Organizations</th>
<th>“Insiders”</th>
<th>“Outsiders”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Town Government</td>
<td></td>
<td>State/ Federal Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional/ National Land Trusts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Light gray = greater trust | Medium gray = less trust | Dark gray = greater mistrust |

In Table II, the levels of relative trust are shown by incremental shading; the darkest shade of gray represents the groups that are least trusted. It can be seen that within the “insider” category, the public or organizational level of insiders such as land trusts and government are trusted comparatively less than the private level of insiders such as long-time residents and farmers. Likewise, individuals who may appear to be outsiders are still more likely to be trusted as a matter of course than “outsider” organizations.

Residents (old-timers vs. newcomers)

A key theme of the research was the sense that the new people coming into the community had significantly different cultural backgrounds, values, and concepts of what constitutes rural fabric than those who are medium- to long-standing residents. The perception amongst study participants is that this “new element” consists of people from New York City or other metropolitan areas who have very high incomes compared to established residents. Respondents repeatedly observed during the interviews that these new residents are determined to bring the same conveniences to town with them that they enjoyed elsewhere, and that these newcomers fail to recognize their own hand in the
destruction of the very qualities they sought by moving to a rural community to begin with. As one respondent stated, “The more people come, the more they’re going to come, and they’re going to start changing the nature of the place. . . . Can you tell them they can’t come?”

It so happened that no participants in the study appeared to fit this description of high-income new resident. How closely the perception of this trend follows reality is of interest, as not all towns are in fact gaining in population. Williamsburg, for instance, has notably lost population over the past 10 years, as discussed in Chapter II.

Agricultural Divide (farmers vs. non-farmers)

The study brought out some attitudes regarding the sensitivity of the non-farming community to the rapidly shrinking farming community. As one farmer emphasized with frustration, “People want a pretty snapshot but don’t maybe understand what a working landscape is and all the things that go into making it look like a pretty landscape.”

While this plays in prominently to the old-timer vs. newcomer discussion above, it is also significant in its own right for the land-use conflicts that arise between farming and non-farming neighbors. This ties back to the discussion in the literature by Coen, Nassauer, and Tuttle (1987), who suggested that the change in political climate over time favors non-farmers and effectively regulates out agriculture as a viable economic activity. Daniels (1997, 132) explains, “Many people who move out to the country are attracted by the promise of bucolic scenery, clean air and water, and reduced noise, crime, and congestion. Pesticide spray drift, the grumble of farm machinery early in the morning or late at night, and the smell of manure do not fit that image of the rural idyll.” Issues of encroachment are also evident in the reverse, in which non-farmers can unintentionally or even deliberately interfere with normal farming operation, causing destruction to farm property, crops, and livestock (Daniels 1997). Clearly the potential for such conflicts grows steadily with the rise of residential construction within the vicinity of working landscapes. Yet it is not only the potential for clashes with immediate neighbors that may create difficulties for farmers struggling to retain their viability over time.

According to American Farmland Trust (1997, 4), “Even without population density, agriculture can be affected by urban influences. Farmers and ranchers are being forced to compete for land and resources, which can reduce or eliminate profits.”
Government (local vs. state/federal)

The interviews elicited strong attitudes about what respondents perceived as the top-down approach of government at the state level or higher. In comparison, local government actions appeared significantly less threatening to the participants, although some level of mistrust was still conveyed by those who still felt that any government intervention at all was suspect. The most common reason given for a greater acceptance at the local level was that the local government was made up of community members that are already known and trusted outside of their government roles. In fact, six of the ten interviewees described themselves as active to some degree in town politics. Even given this level of comfort, however, the vocal opposition to all government interference was surprisingly strong. A clear hierarchical picture emerged that the closer the government was to home, the more likely respondents would be inclined to cooperate, but only to an extent. This finding falls in line with a study undertaken for the Council on Excellence in Government by the Government Finance Officers Association in 1999 that indicates American citizens place greater confidence in their local governments than they do in state or federal entities. This study went on to conclude that six out of ten people reported a disconnect in their relationship with government in general (Government Finance Officers Association 1999). It would not be surprising to find this negative relationship even more pronounced in the rural segment of this national sample, bearing out the anti-government sentiment expressed in the present interviews.

Land Trusts (local vs. state/national)

“Local land trusts that I’m familiar with have done amazing work. The Trustees of Reservations, can’t say enough good things about that organization. Top notch, top of the list.”

- interview participant

Queries on the relative differences that respondents perceived between local, regional, and national land trusts did not generate great amounts of discussion, but the results did show that local land trusts, as with local government, are preferred over non-local entities. In this case, the same reasoning was applied; local land trusts are often made up of local members of the community, and are therefore considered “insiders” when compared to larger or more distant organizations. Even so, the general lack of familiarity with land trusts that characterized responses suggested that respondents may still view such organizations with wariness, attributing to them a status of
“outsider,” perhaps for no other reason than the mere fact they are an organization. As noted earlier, one respondent had even expressed what he felt was a common attitude (though not his own) shared by many Hilltown residents towards any government or private entity, that even land trusts appear suspect to community members, who believed that any such organizations are, like everyone else, out to make a profit.

Residency Length and Perceived Rural Change

One prominent theme centered on length of residency and perception of rural change. Long time residents of the communities noted the sense of eroding community and the rural experience over the years, expressing that they have less of a connection to the local people and landscape as new people continue to move in and build houses. To these residents, much like in Dubbink’s research (1984), the town has already irretrievably lost its rural identity. Perhaps these comments reflect Dubbink’s (1984) conclusions, that an attempt to salvage the scenic, pseudo-rustic character of the town is a hollow one, as such action does not reach back to rescue the practical, on-the-ground qualities that living and working in the country had once truly embodied. Thus any efforts performed for the sake of recapturing or retaining rural essence are for the benefit of the newcomer, who perhaps unknowingly realizes the luxury to pick and choose amongst rural qualities for those that reflect the serenity he or she is seeking, while slicing out unsavory realities that farm and forest work actually entails (Dubbink 1984). Ryan’s research (1998) on perceptions of river corridors produced measurable results to indicate that the long-term rural resident is more apt to favor the more prosaic backyard scene to the comparatively “wild” river corridor scene to which the newcomer was primarily drawn. This research concluded that the values between these groups are distinctly divergent, with those who are long-term country dwellers placing value on that which is practical and controllable, i.e. cultivated lands such as those they might personally have had a hand in taming (Ryan 1998). Newcomers, on the other hand, valued the bucolic, natural-looking places that appear untouched by human intervention (Ryan 1998), presumably the same impulse that drew them out to begin with from their heavily settled places seeking what they believed to be a simpler life in the country.

In the five-town study, those who had moved from urban or suburban areas almost uniformly expressed relief at the significant lack of urban problems and the sense of a buffer that
the rural experience provided from some less palatable facets of the “real world.” Medium-length residents (20-30 years) were the most likely to express a deep dismay at the rapidly changing face of the rural landscape, suggesting that they had found in the community a haven, but equally harbor a deep fear of losing what they initially came here to gain. Still, it seemed here that this subset of respondents was perhaps more firmly integrated into rural culture than the longest term residents might suppose, and not so unable to perceive the economic and social realities of rural existence as Dubbink’s (1984) study suggested. Several comments reflected the thought and care that these respondents gave the dilemmas facing their five communities on all fronts. They recognized their own inescapable roles in bringing about rural change by their in-migration, yet were quick to line up with those who have farmed the land for generations and point fingers at the most recent of arrivals. It may be that these medium-term residents perceive themselves as the voice of reason, serving to bridge the old-new divide, and as often seeing themselves an integral part of the local farm-forest economy as not.

**Conclusions**

An overarching theme emerged from the data that people feel a deep mistrust and lack of confidence in any level of government and its processes, even while the same respondents acknowledged their dismay and even fear at the prospect of losing the special qualities that make their communities rural. In particular, medium-length residents were the most vocal about their concerns for community character loss while expressing their anti-government sentiments. This finding aligns fairly well with the previous Walker (2003) and Lokocz (2005) findings, except in this case the medium-term residents were the ones who exhibited the strongest opinions rather than the long-term. This result may be explained in part by the preponderance (50%) of medium-length participants (ranging from 10-30 years) in this study. Also, given the small sample size it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about whether the two research sets are truly in conflict. In agreement with the previous studies, the longest-term residents did share many of those same opinions, at least to a degree, but in this study were not as outspoken in this regard as the medium-term participants. As a whole the respondents to the current study reflected the common perception of rural residents as ruggedly self-deterministic; people who are as deeply protective of these places of livelihood and home as they are of their rights as private landowners.
The heart of this research is to understand the strength of feeling people have for their eroding rural landscapes and the extent that they’re willing to go to protect them, and concurrently the level of open-mindedness they have about cooperating with different agencies attempting to do the same. As expressed in the Discussion chapter, people do connect strongly with their own lands and those across their communities. They also feel very strongly about their independence and fiercely protect their personal rights and freedoms, although the anti-government attitude was not by any means absolute. At the same time that people anticipated a sense of loss as inevitable rural change occurs, they showed recognition of the necessity for land-use controls and the value of cooperative efforts with both private and public agencies who are working to keep this change intelligently channeled. This final section attempts to identify some implications of these outcomes for various stakeholders in their efforts to guard the long-term viability of a distinctly rural economy, landscape, and way of life.

**Students and Other Researchers**

People’s attachments to place still appear in direct conflict with feelings about the importance of personal property rights. Rural residents appear to not be easily persuaded by government-level programs. More research is called for to explore this incompatibility of perceptions and to find out what possibilities may exist to bridge this critical disconnect.

The results of this particular study point to the need for followup studies that may explore qualitatively and quantitatively the connection between attachment to landscape and willingness to sacrifice personal freedoms to preserve that landscape. The past surveys and current interview techniques together produced a complementary package of information that included both larger
statistical data about the communities, and very specific, in-depth data that relied on the voices of a few individuals. In formulating future studies, researchers may want to consider one or more focus groups as a good middle ground to capture a larger subset of voices in these communities that could have greater statistical relevance than the current one, and to bolster the more individualized and in-depth type of information than the surveys provided. These focus groups could target local subsets of residents that this study targeted as individuals, such as farmers, newcomers, commuters, and government- or non-government-involved individuals.

These particular respondents had a preponderance of local community connections that brought and kept them in town, and they found it difficult to isolate reasons for living in those places that didn’t involve work, family, or an extended history or network in the region. Even the most recently transplanted respondents did not come in completely unconnected; they either moved from a rural or nearby semi-rural town or came into the community via marriage, suggesting a sample bias that leaves out an important contingency that reflects the advent of upscale newcomers from metropolitan regions that were so often cited during the interviews. It may only be a matter of perception that such newcomers are arriving and would bear a closer look at who is actually moving into the communities.

**Governments and Planning Practitioners**

“Governments have a schizophrenic relationship to land. They want to see it developed so the tax base will increase and the economy will grow, yet they are also active in preserving land.”

- Daniels n.d., 9 (first page of article)

As governments struggle with balancing the conflicting needs of their communities, they also contend with public perception and acceptance, even for programs with negligible negative impacts. The interview outcomes here strongly suggest that it is essential for planners and members of government to earn the community’s trust if they hope to gain respect and cooperation in working towards the preservation of priority landscapes as more houses are built in town.

Most overt planning activity takes place at the state or local level, because of a cautious treatment of planning that the government traditionally takes the federal level (Levy 2006). While it does have the power to impact state and local policy by directed funding initiatives, the federal government’s most common role in land preservation efforts may well be in providing tax relief
for landowners who are willing and able to donate or otherwise enroll their land in preservation programs (Levy 2006; Daniels and Bowers 1997). Given that rural community trust appears especially low for government at the federal level, in theory any regulatory policy or contract agreements at this level are least likely to be embraced by the local townspeople.

The Commonwealth suffers a similar fate as far as image is concerned. State regulations are not happily complied with, and the bureaucracy that surrounds the more lucrative voluntary programs puts off many people who might otherwise be willing to participate, according to the interview responses. To make matters worse, as identified in the literature review, Massachusetts law can often be an anathema not only to its private citizens, but to local conservation-minded government officials and planners as well, who find their hands tied by the permissiveness of outdated zoning statutes such as ANR (approval not required) lots, or the difficult two-thirds majority rule that is necessary to bring about effective change in local zoning and planning regulations already on the books (Lowitt et al. 2006; Zoning Reform Working Group n.d.). The Commonwealth must strongly consider an effective update of the laws that currently cripple and undermine its own efforts to provide a means for the preservation of the working and scenic landscapes across the state (Lowitt et al. 2006; Zoning Reform Working Group n.d.). Particularly, a thorough review and revision of ANR zoning would be prudent, as reflected in both the literature review and the interview results. In considering the compatibility of land conservation and development goals, one respondent had summarized bluntly, “So are they compatible goals? Um, yeah. Yeah, absolutely. The biggest threat to that is ANRs.” As some interviewees also suggested, programs such as the Agricultural Preservation Restriction that have demonstrated past effectiveness in preservation goals should continue to be highly prioritized at the state level. It should not be overlooked, however, that so many respondents were highly critical of both the arduous process that such programs entail and the prospect of these same programs removing land from the local tax rolls, causing residents to feel they must bear a greater burden of already exorbitant property taxes.

Local rural governments have the challenge of helping to foster political representation of the community “insiders” as the towns shift balance to accommodate newer residents playing a role in town government. As relative newcomers come to represent the majority in town demographics, planners and conservation groups will find it necessary to strike a balance between meeting the needs of long-time, government-suspicious residents and newer members of the community who
may readily interact with and involve themselves in government affairs. Both a lack of willingness to embrace change on the part of old-timers and insensitivity to the local context on the part of newcomers may be addressed most effectively by education and communication. This point was emphasized repeatedly by some interviewees as the best or only way to reach the rural contingency. Such a challenge may be successfully addressed by a partnership effort at the state and local government levels, and particularly with local land trusts that may be the most ideally positioned agencies to make primary contact with members of the community.

It is also incumbent on local governments to update their zoning and land-use regulations, something else noted directly by interviewees. As discussed in the literature review, an array of regulatory planning tools exists for municipalities and planners to utilize. Although it is certainly prudent to take care not to push regulations so far as to invoke severe backlash from the community, perhaps local governments have been overly timid in this regard. Most of the interview participants expressed an acknowledgment that government regulations are, at least to some degree, necessary steps towards preserving the rural character the respondents find so attractive. With the right mix of community participation and sensitivity to local circumstances, practitioners may well find that a mutually supportive palette of well-considered land preservation tools is not so difficult to implement in their towns.

According to the interview results, local government has the most leverage as a public institution to direct and control future growth, as it is the most likely, if not only, level of government to have a respected voice within the community. Because of the innate distrust that rural residents have for government programs in general, local governments and planning agencies would do well to take advantage of those programs that have little to no negative implications for its constituents.

Of the viable methods of land conservation discussed in the literature review, the transfer of development rights (TDRs) tool is a good example of one that bears a closer look, particularly for the communities in this study that are currently exploring inter-community initiatives. Whether through the Five Town Action Initiative or independently, these five communities are united in their desire to preserve their working landscapes and open spaces, while having some distinctly differing characteristics that make some of them more able to accommodate controlled growth than others. In addition, individual towns may find that rigorously promoting a thriving village center in favor of
subdividing large farms into 2-acre lots is not so out of keeping with the historical and cultural roots of the town. Chesterfield, for instance, once harbored far more local industry and residences in its town center than it does today, signifying that it could draw on that historical pattern as it considers TDRs or other methods of intelligently directing its future growth. As identified earlier, TDRs have some relatively cumbersome hurdles that need to be overcome to make it work, but the benefits may well outweigh the initial frustrations of implementation for these five towns or for any community or regional partnership considering the pros and cons of tools such as the TDR.

Along with TDRs, other initiatives that can take advantage of a multi-jurisdictional approach would be especially profitable for rural governments to consider. Wherever towns find themselves able to apply tools on a cooperative, regional basis, they will likely put such tools to their most effective use, as well as possibly find greater support to move forward locally with an entire rural region behind the effort (Daniels n.d.).

Finally, local governments can round out their toolkits by emulating innovative tax relief and other incentive programs that are showing signs of success elsewhere, such as the development rights payment in a “like kind exchange” implemented in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania (Daniels n.d.; Daniels and Bowers 1997).

**Land Trusts and Similar Nonprofits**

“A very real attraction of land trusts is that they may offer more permanent protection of farmland and natural resources than a government agency, public land-use regulations, or fee-simple private ownership. Land trusts can play a complementary role in the comprehensive planning process, especially in determining where development should go and which lands should remain protected from development.”

- Daniels and Bowers 1997, 215-216

Private, nonprofit land trusts in Massachusetts enjoy a long and respected tradition. This state has a staggering number of such organizations providing resources and means of land protection for the benefit of landowners, farmers, foresters, and private citizens, as well as conservation-oriented planners and government practitioners. Given this rich resource, it is telling that so few respondents in this interview identified any land trusts by name or demonstrated knowledge about their roles and capacities in regards to land conservation.

This study has shown that land trusts are not well-understood or recognized, if these participants are any indication of the awareness within the communities at large. Those who had
the greatest knowledge of land trusts and their role in facilitating landowner options also showed significant respect for their work. Those particular respondents worked within the community and exhibited a higher level of political involvement than those who tended to know little to nothing about land trusts. This suggests that the encouragement of community participation is a favorable means of expanding awareness about land trusts or similar organizations and their capabilities to provide expertise and guidance that is relevant and useful to the landowner.

At the same time, results here indicated a strong likelihood that land trusts, particularly local ones, may be best poised to gain a receptive audience in efforts to educate landowners and farmers on options for the conservation of private property. Because of this, their continued role in providing education and assistance to landowners and other interested citizens is critical. In addition, all attempts to strengthen existing and develop new partnership opportunities with local and state government or other conservation entities will not be wasted. Maintaining or increasing visibility in their target towns is important, especially for local organizations that are best situated to gain the trust and recognition from members in their own or nearby communities. Land trusts at the state, regional, and local levels, which already provide an admirable scope of services and educational materials, may well be the best candidate to move in swiftly and negotiate land-related matters that some landowners simply will not approach local or state governments to sort out. Land trusts or similar conservation organizations are doubtlessly aware that they must often be out on the front lines as leaders in agricultural, scenic, recreational, and ecological preservation efforts. The interview results here strongly reinforce this role and suggest the need for even greater communication and collaboration, not only on the parts of the land trusts themselves, but on the parts of planners, government officials, and other conservation leaders to approach these organizations, direct others to them, and generally aim to bolster the efforts of land trusts from a local to a federal level.

The American Farmland Trust (AFT) is the only land trust at the national level that works exclusively for the benefit of agricultural preservation (Daniels and Bowers 1997). This organization, Daniels and Bowers (1997, 195) go on to explain, “has the dual purpose of stopping the loss of productive farmland and promoting farming practices that ensure a healthy environment.” Its New England regional office is situated in Northampton, Massachusetts, in close proximity to the five towns in this study. Because of this locale, Massachusetts as a whole and certainly local rural farmland communities around Northampton greatly benefit from this active community resource.
As a result, the AFT most likely enjoys a far greater level of recognition and acceptance from these nearby communities than would normally be expected for a nationwide agency. This organization is well-placed to meld with the collaborative efforts of local and state-level land trusts such as The Trustees of Reservations (TTOR), and further the educational and preservation goals of local communities. Yet if the interview results are anything to go by, this national organization may still find they are met with greater reserve than the TTOR or a local land trust, and may have to take greater pains to secure the confidence of less familiar members of the five communities.

The Trustees of Reservations is the oldest state-level land trust in the country and a leader in land conservation efforts across Massachusetts (Daniels and Bowers 1997). Their instituted program, the Highland Communities Initiative (HCI), is an example of the way a larger, seemingly remote organization has found a way to bring needed services to rural communities in Western Massachusetts, and at the same time personalize their organization so that it is strongly connected to the local people of the Highlands region. Like the AFT, HCI is readily accessible both in location and in partnering with local land trusts, government, and community members to achieve preservation goals. This kind of effort is key to putting a local face on a larger state-level organization that may otherwise generate mistrust on the part of local community members.

An innovative partnership between the five communities, the Highlands Community Initiative, and the Center for Rural Massachusetts (Center for Rural Massachusetts 2005), the Five Town Action Initiative is the kind of collaborative effort that will likely serve as a stellar model for other rural regions struggling to find the time and resources to realize their planning efforts. This type of partnership is likely to pay huge dividends in both the implementation of conservation-minded or economically vital projects and the awakening of the public and government alike to the commonsense and results-producing synergy that can generate from such a regional approach.

These collaborations, projects, and organizations, along with several others, are doing immense work to raise the public consciousness and create mutually beneficial arrangements with owners of multiple acres of land. The spokespeople for each of these organizations, where they are also members of the communities in which they are doing work, likely realize more acceptance and trust simply by their status as local residents. Judging from the responses to these interviews, a longer-standing resident will especially enjoy an elevated status as a trustworthy conservation partner. If the ‘insider-outsider’ model described in the Discussion chapter continues to hold true, the most
effective work will be done from the inside of these communities, and that is the greatest challenge at hand for communities that may have only a few tireless, actively involved citizens (both professionals and laypeople) intent on preserving the character of their towns.

**Landowners and Other Rural Residents**

The purposes of this research are generally aimed at contributing to a greater understanding at the professional level of the crux of landowner-government conflict and the potential for a middle ground. However, both the conversations that happened during these interviews and common sense suggest that the average private citizen may not only be interested in but increasingly motivated to educate themselves on the issues at stake. For those who own large tracts of land used for farming, timber harvesting, or simply personal enjoyment, the management responsibilities are likely enormous, and tax burdens may be equally discouraging. For landowners who have not yet investigated the variety of options available regarding the ultimate fate of their properties, it is important for them to seize opportunities to learn as much as possible before making any irreversible decisions in any direction. This is to avoid the pitfalls of entering in any kind of agreement at all in which the full implications are not well-understood, as much as it is to avoid the potential heartache of losing land to development that could have been kept in the family for future generations.

Those involved in rural land-based industry, while an increasing political minority, have some of the most compelling stories and perspectives on the changes wrought on the landscape as time goes by. It is vital that these stories are heard not only by policymakers and other collaborators, but also by fellow community members and recently arrived residents. For without a continuity of dialogue surrounding the necessities of agricultural production, it is less likely that the farm and forest economy will survive as it now stands, never mind continue to attract new generations of potential farmers and others willing to invest in the future of rural resource-based businesses. Public awareness and education of the social and economic factors of rural living are the responsibility of those who still practice it, as much as it is for policymakers, planners, and other land preservationists.

**Final Thoughts**

This research has touched on a full array of perspectives in human-landscape interaction, ranging from place attachment and environmental health to rural economics and government-citizen
dynamics. Due to the breadth of topics explored in the literature review and brought up within the interviews themselves, it is nearly impossible to fully and properly address each of these subjects to the extent that any one of them rightly deserves in the space of this paper. Still, the inclusion of this span of background information and data was essential to set a greater context for the central questions asked in this study, and hint at the rich complexity and interdependence of countless yet relevant sociocultural factors that this context suggests. Still, the core inquiries that this research rests upon are essential to distill and summarize.

As seen above, this study indicates a deep and thriving attachment to rural places, based on some combination of having long-standing connections to these lands and wanting a safe, quiet haven from other places that are perceived as busy, dangerous, and impersonal. Equally emphatic was the expressed love for the privacy and independence that the rural lifestyle affords. This study strongly supports the general supposition of local antipathy and heavy disconnect from distant government bodies and policies. These back up the other studies in this research series, and the greater body of literature in this area. People love the lands they possess, drive by, and recreate on, and may simply watch them disappear thinking there is nothing that can be done to save them. With such a fragile but beloved connectivity of forests, farmlands, scenic, and ecological resources at stake in Massachusetts, the greatest news these interviews impart is that people most certainly care, and with the right messenger they just might have the ears to listen to a balanced and informed approach to the preservation of the rural landscape.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. Perceptions about Rural Places:

How would you describe what makes a place “rural”? What kinds of things do you expect to see in rural communities that make them distinct or unique?

Generally, what do think it is about living or working in a rural place that appeals to people? Do you think that people find living in a rural community to be healthier or less stressful than other types of places?

2. Perceptions about Rural Land Resources (i.e. forests, farming, stone/rock quarries, open space):

What do you feel is the primary importance of these land resources for the Hilltowns and your community? In what ways do you feel these factors make the community a better place?

What issues or potential changes do you see coming up that might affect these resources within the next 10 to 20 years?

3. Connections with Local Places:

How long have you lived in this community?

- If you moved here from elsewhere or live part of the year elsewhere, what are some of the factors that brought you here?

- If you were born and raised here, how long of a history does your family have living in this community?

What parts of living in your community do you most value?

What places in town are most important or special to you? Which ones would you make it a point to show to out-of-town guests? If you moved away from this region, what places or events would you most miss?

What kinds of places in the area do you like to go to relax or reduce stress? Do you think your ability to handle stress and illness would be about the same or different if you lived in a more urbanized setting?
4. Development & Rural Character

Do you feel that allowing for new development and maintaining rural character are compatible goals?

What do you think is the most important approach that the government can do to prevent unwanted changes to the visual character (the general appearance and scale) of your community? Would you say that government land regulations are necessary or unnecessary to ensure that the character of the Hilltowns remains rural as new development occurs?

What is the most important thing a landowner can do to help retain rural character?

Are voluntary programs likely to be effective or ineffective in keeping this area looking and feeling rural in the long term?

5. Livelihood & Landownership:

Do you derive a portion of your income from land or natural resource-based work activities? If so, is this on your own land? Approximately how many acres of land do you own?

Do you or a household or family member own and/or operate your own business? Do you or others in your family or household work locally? (i.e. in this town or one abutting?)

In the future, do you think locally based, relatively small-scale businesses will be economically viable in your community? (i.e. small-scale manufacturing, assembly, processing, village retail, home businesses)

6. Local Government:


What do you think the role of local government should be in regulating land use and development of private land in your community? How does this apply to your own land?
How supportive would you say local government has been in promoting locally based jobs and businesses? How have regulations helped or hindered land-based businesses such as farming, forestry, stone quarrying, etc.?

7. Land Conservation Programs:
Programs designed to protect certain rural places from future development can be initiated by the government as well as by land trusts or other nonprofit organizations, and sometimes by the local community. These programs may be mandatory, incentive-based or voluntary, and may involve selling or donating property or certain property rights to public or private organizations.

In what ways do you think land conservation programs impact rural character and community?

What are your opinions about land conservation programs run by the state government? Local government? Land trusts? Do you have personal experience with any of these types of land conservation programs?
- If so, how would you characterize this experience?
- If not, what, if anything, have you heard others say about their experiences?

If you own acreage, what options have you considered for managing the future of your own land? (Develop, preserve, leave as-is, don’t know…)

Do you have any recommendations for how government or land trusts could operate more effectively in the future in efforts to retain the rural feel of your community?

Any final thoughts?
Maps created by the author with ArcGIS (ESRI) software during 2006-2007 using data from the following source:

Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS)
Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
APPENDIX C

PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUDY AREA

All photographs taken by the author in 2006.
ASHFIELD
CHESTERFIELD
CONWAY
GOSHEN
WILLIAMSBURG
WORKS CITED


**Center for Rural Massachusetts. 2005.** University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Center for Rural Massachusetts (CRM) web page. http://www.umass.edu/larp/crm/.


