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Site Evaluation Study for a Horse Park in Massachusetts

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About the Center for Economic Development

The Center for Economic Development (CED) is a research and community-oriented technical assistance center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Housed in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, the CED provides technical assistance, undertakes critical studies, disseminates information, and enhances local and multi-community capacity for strategic planning and development. This approach is designed to relate the concerns and goals of commerce and industry to those of the broader community. The CED works closely with community and business sectors, providing information and assistance needed for growth, management, and public benefit. The CED's clientele reflects that the Center does indeed work well with all sectors: community development corporations, state agencies, municipalities, regional planning agencies, developers, business leaders, chambers of commerce, local officials, public groups, and the managers of firms.

Section I: Introduction

In the spring of 2016, the New England Horseman’s Protective and Benevolent Association (The Association) requested the services of the Center for Economic Development (CED) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst to assist its members develop a vision for a world-class equestrian center that would be placed in Massachusetts. This assignment required CED to work with an Advisory Board – consisting of Association members, equestrian center operators, equine studies managers, and equestrian merchants – to create a vision of the park and center, to determine its markers of success and to undertake an economic feasibility study that would show potential financial returns to the Commonwealth. The outcomes of this assignment were presented in a report to the Association in July 2016, entitled *Towards the Creation of a Horse Park in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts: A Feasibility Study*. The vision is summarized below. The proposed components of the Horse Park are listed in Table 1, and the markers of success can be found in Table 2.

The Massachusetts Horse Park will house a comprehensive collection of activities that will appeal to a wide array of ages and equine and non-equine interests, attracting citizens from across New England and tourists from across the nation.

The Horse Park will establish a model for equestrian revitalization, relying on inclusive and forward-thinking programs focused on mutual benefit.

Table 1: Proposed Components of the Massachusetts Horse Park

Agricultural/Equine	Public	Private
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horse shows and competitions • Thoroughbred racing with simulcast and OTB • Breeding • Veterinary care • Stabling • Retirement/Sales • Trail Riding & Riding Lessons • Internships/4-H • Therapeutic Recreation • Agricultural Vocational School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairs • Lodging/RV stalls • Pop-Up Markets • Recreation fields • Hiking/Skiing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conferences • Private parties • Catered events

Table 2: Markers of Success for the Commonwealth

Agricultural	Recreational	Financial
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened agricultural job base. • Increased protected open space acreage. • Enhanced opportunities for equine-based youth activities and educational programs. • Stimulated equine research programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new tourist attraction with wide appeal. • A conference and trade show venue serving the equestrian lifestyle. • Expanded access to recreational trails for walking, horseback riding, or cross-country skiing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention of gaming revenues that would have gone elsewhere. • Generation of new revenue streams on site. • Patronage of park visitors will benefit other local businesses.

Tables 3 and 4 provide a summary, based upon the CED’s economic analysis, of the potential employment, income, sales and tax revenue impacts of the proposed project to the Commonwealth. Dollar amounts are reported in 2016 dollars, and the tax revenues included in Table 4 do not site-dependent sources, such as property taxes or a Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT).

Table 3: Summary Economic Impacts (Statewide)

	Employment (Full-time equivalent)	Labor Income	Output (Sales)
Direct Effect	651.7	\$34,905,383	\$53,785,565
Indirect Effect	98.4	\$6,011,609	\$13,503,183
Induced Effect	207	\$12,216,334	\$31,569,240
Total Effect	957	\$53,133,324	\$98,857,986

Table 4: State Tax Revenue Impacts

	Total
Employee Compensation	\$78,244
Tax on Production and Imports	\$3,125,820
Households	\$1,678,505
Corporations	\$188,253
Total	\$5,070,822

The overall findings of the assessment clearly show that a proposed Horse Park would provide great value to the Commonwealth.

In the summer of 2016, the Association requested that the CED undertake a study determining potential locations for the park and center. Working again with the Association’s Advisory Board, the Center first created a comprehensive checklist that was designed to evaluate the optimality of potential sites. This checklist served as a primary guide in the Center’s assignments. The Advisory Committee then presented four potential sites that were to be examined. Two sites were in the Massachusetts town of Douglas, with additional sites in the towns of Spencer and West Brookfield. Upon obtaining this input, the Center’s staff applied the checklist to these towns, undertook field visits to the potential sites and interviewed community leaders concerning whether they would be supportive of a park and center in their towns.

Section II: Methods for Site Evaluation

This section provides a description and rationale for the selection criteria, and describes the process of evaluation. To determine the features most closely associated with the presence of a horse park, Phase I of the project surveyed the physical and locational aspects of existing facilities across the country, and consulted with industry experts to provide additional context for the proposed facility's unique combination of uses. That review provided the broad-scale attributes necessary for determining the feasibility of potential sites to host a horse park.

This report builds on the results of Phase I in three ways: first, by expanding the assessment to incorporate relevant community characteristics; second, by creating an in-depth checklist to ensure thorough review of the factors in play at each potential site; and third, by undertaking site visits to assess the physical and locational attributes of the sites from an on-the-ground perspective. The site visits also included meetings with town officials to gauge prospective interest in the project and to verify information collected during our evaluation.

Our evaluation comprises eight categories, with multiple metrics within each. Categories address the site itself, the municipality, and broader contextual elements pertaining to socioeconomics and equine/tourism activity.

The categories were chosen for their relevance to the aesthetic, logistic, cultural, and tourism components the proposed horse park would require. While there is overlap between some of the factors within the categories, each category plays a large role in assessing the fitness of a given site. We present the following rationale for each.

Agricultural Character: Examines the extent to which farming is present, embraced, or accounted for in the community and nearby towns. The purpose of this category is to identify the extent to which the agricultural aspect of the Horse Park may form a symbiotic relationship to local farms and farm products.

Town Governance: Examines management performance and human resources personnel in the municipal governments of the potential host communities. The purpose of this category is to assess local capacity to navigate and participate in the complex process of developing a facility such as a Horse Park.

Branding and Community Character: Examines well-known indicators of community well-being and commercial activity. The purpose of this category is to ensure that potential sites are a strong visual, environmental, and economic match for the Horse Park.

Planning Compatibility: Examines a community's stated goals and objectives regarding population growth, agricultural activity, open space conservation, economic development, zoning, and aesthetics. The purpose of this category is to identify the extent to which the Horse Park's uses and presence would fit with local community development goals.

Infrastructural Compatibility: Examines each community's transportation connections and utility systems. The purpose of this category is to ensure that potential communities are adequately served by roads with high levels of service, and to assess whether any excess utility capacity exists for the development of a Horse Park.

Connecting Activities: Examines the proximity of relevant equestrian and non-equestrian tourism activities to each potential site. The purpose of this category is to identify the extent to which the Horse Park would enhance existing equine services, and how well the facility could complement existing tourism destinations.

Market Factors: Examines population and income levels at varying distances from each potential site. The purpose of this category is to demonstrate a critical mass of local, nearby, and regional visitors, as well as to assess the relative prosperity in and around each potential location.

Site Characteristics: Examines the features of the site itself, as well as its immediate surroundings. The purpose of this category is to assess the limitations and opportunities at each site, to determine where substantial logistical or physical limitations might exist.

Table 5 summarizes the contents of the checklist, identifying the metrics for each category.

We relied on a number of sources to assess a site's performance through each of these metrics. At the local level, we reviewed master plans, zoning bylaws, open space and recreation plans, and other municipal documents from Select Boards, Conservation Commissions, and the offices of Town Managers, Town Planners, and Town Clerks. State resources include School and District profiles from the Department of Education, the Department of Revenue's Municipal Databank, the Department of Agricultural Resources farm maps, and the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Heritage and Landscape Inventory Program. Federal data sources included eligibility guides for grant programs administered by the US Department of Agriculture, and demographic data from the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau. Additional data was gathered from the US Equestrian Federation, Massachusetts 4-H, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, and regional Chambers of Commerce.

The final portion of the evaluation consisted of visits to the four sites. This enabled the study team to examine more closely issues related to access, community character, surrounding land uses, site terrain, community support, and other characteristics. Section III provides more details on the three communities and sites.

Table 5: Checklist for Community/Site Assessment

Agriculture	Town Governance	Character	Planning	Infrastructure	Connectivity	Market	Site
Right-to-farm zoning	Select Board stability	Household incomes	Master plan characteristics	Interstate access	To large-animal hospital	Population (10- 20-50-miles)	Acres on site
Total farms in town	Professional municipal management	Public school performance	Capital plan supports agriculture	State route access	To horse retirement farm	Household income (10- 20-50-miles)	Adjacent public acres
Total farms within 15 mi	Bond ratings	Regional planning association activity	Capital budget supports agriculture	Airport access	To closest equestrian training	High-level household income (10- 20-50-miles)	Utilities on site
Local equine farms	Professional planning	Chamber of Commerce	Mixed-use zoning	Utility system (water, gas, sewer, elec.)	To closest equestrian competition		Existing structures
Active 4-H	Economic development committee	Compatible tourism	Aesthetic site planning regulations	Excess system capacity	To 3-star hotel		Access via non-res. areas
Farmer's organizations	Farm agent	Community Preservation Act funding		Renewable energy potential	To 18-hole golf course		Ag/forest surroundings
State parks and forests		Historic attributes		Fiber-optic internet	To national historic site		Incompatible land uses
Agricultural high school		Aesthetic design standards			To nearby ski areas		Proximity to state parks
Acreage in Chapter 61							Terrain flat/dry
USDA funding eligibility							Chapter 61 protection
Farmers markets, agricultural festivals							

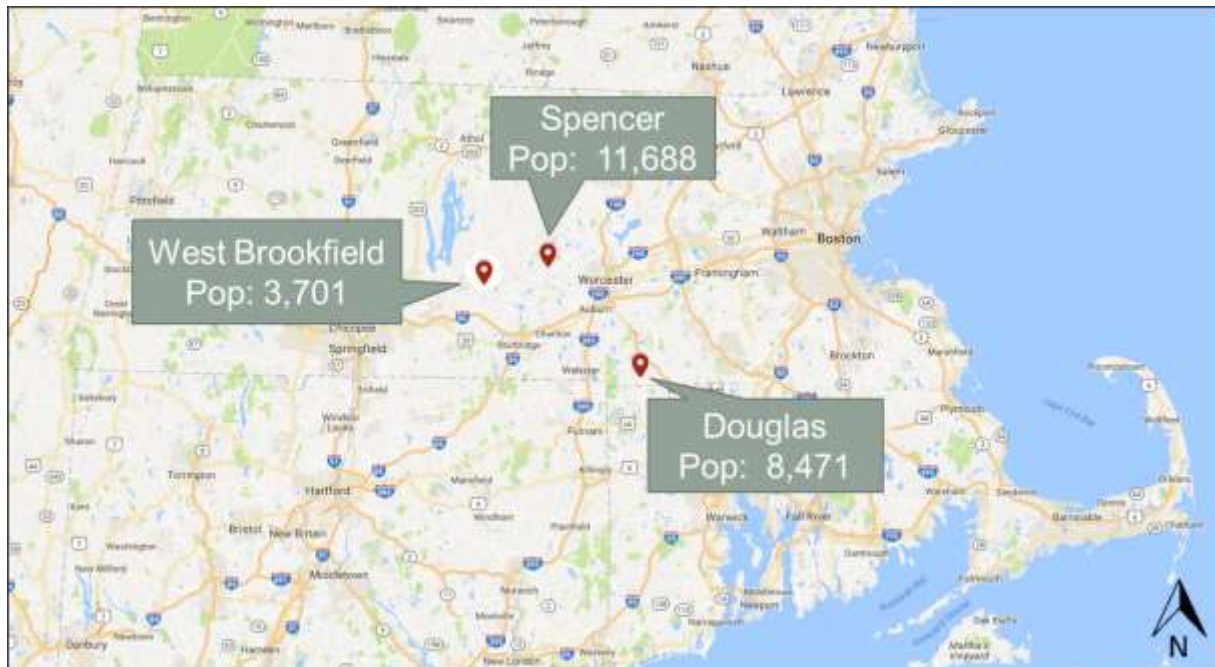
Section III: Brief Description of Candidate Sites

This section provides a regional perspective on the four sites, and then provides a brief overview of each community and the available site within it.

Regional Perspective

The three communities reviewed in this report are in towns within the southern half of Worcester County (Figure 1). The towns of Spencer and West Brookfield lie in the rolling uplands southeast of the Quabbin Reservoir. To the southeast, the town of Douglas borders Rhode Island and Connecticut, and sits on relatively flat terrain at the western edge of the Blackstone River's watershed.

Figure 1: Location of Prospective Site Communities



The prospective communities are in an area with relatively little competitive equestrian activity: to the east are venues in the towns bound by I-95, I-90, and I-495, and to the west are venues in the Pioneer Valley between Amherst and West Springfield (Figure 2). Interestingly, the venues in Boston's western suburbs accommodate hunter/jumper, equitation, and eventing competitions (black squares), while the venues along the Connecticut show a marked preference for dressage (yellow pins).

Figure 2: Existing Equestrian Venues in Massachusetts



In short, a horse park developed in any one of these towns would complement existing activity along the spectrum of competitive equestrianism, and become a new focus for equine activity in Central Massachusetts.

Spencer: Town and Site

Located in central Worcester County, Spencer sits about 10 miles due west of Worcester. Just under half of the town's 11,700 residents live in the center of town, where state Route 31 (north-south) and Route 9 (east-west) divide the town into quadrants. Although Spencer's population grew substantially through the 1970s, it is nearly the same now as it was in 1990. The town is primarily a bedroom community of Worcester, with a median household income (MHI) of \$60,500. This is slightly below the statewide MHI of \$67,800, but well above the national figure of \$51,800. Spencer's schools lag behind in performance measures, with the elementary, middle, and high schools well below average according to statewide performance percentiles.

The site is on McCormick Road, in a largely undeveloped area approximately two miles north of the center of town (Figure 3). Very close by the site is the well-known Saint Joseph's Abbey of the Trappist Monks. The 192 acres of hilly upland are 14 miles from I-90, and 13 miles from I-190. It is bordered to the north by 480 acres of public open space, including a state forest and a 4-H center, and bound to the east by a brook that flows southward through a former mill village. At \$1.125 million, its cost is \$5,860/acre.

Figure 3: Spencer (McCormick Road) site location

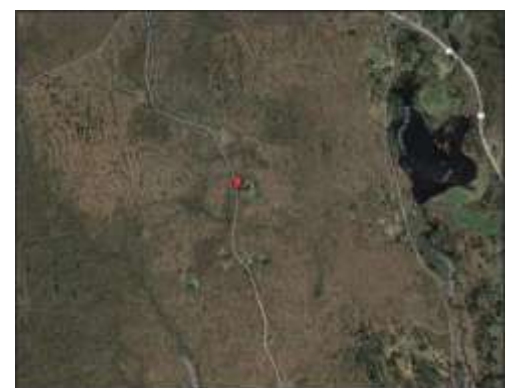
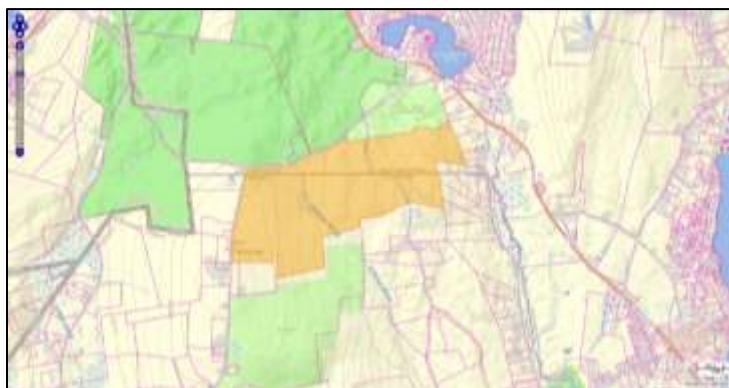


West Brookfield: Town and Site

West Brookfield is a small town at the western edge of Worcester County, approximately 45 minutes from both Springfield and Worcester. Route 67 and Route 9 traverse the town, sharing a concurrency of about one mile through the town center. West Brookfield has a population of approximately 3,700, making it the smallest of the three towns examined in this report. Over 1,400 of those residents live in the town center, which is little more than one square mile. The West Brookfield Center Historic District anchors the town center, and has been listed on the National Register since 1990. The town's MHI of \$57,400 is 85 percent of the statewide MHI, but fairly representative of the western portion of Worcester County. West Brookfield's schools are relatively strong, with the elementary school well above average and the high school about average, according to statewide performance percentiles.

The site is on Beaman Road, in the northwestern section of the town and less than one mile from Route 9. A portion of the 289 acres crosses the town border into Warren, where the land slopes downward and a brook runs approximately one mile to the Quaboag River. The site is bordered to the north by over 800 acres of public open space in the form of a wildlife management area, as well as privately held conservation land. Beaman Road is 12 miles from Interstate 90, and approximately twice that distance from I-290. The land is \$1.09 million, or \$3,772/acre.

Figure 4: West Brookfield (Beaman Road) site location



Douglas: Town and Site

Douglas is a growing town with a population of approximately 8,500. With just under 3,000 residents in 1970, the town's population has grown by more than 1,000 people each decade, from 1980 onwards. It is nearly half an hour from both Worcester and Providence, and approximately one hour from Boston. Route 16 travels east-west through the town center, intersecting with Route 146 to the east and I-395 to the west. Route 96 travels southeasterly from the town center into Rhode Island. Douglas is a fairly prosperous town, with an MHI of \$84,600, some 125 percent of the statewide MHI. Douglas's schools are fairly average in performance measures, with the elementary and middle schools at or slightly above the average, and the high school slightly below the average, according to statewide performance percentiles.

The first site is on Southeast Main Street, in the southeastern corner of town near the Uxbridge border (Figure 5). The site is 515 acres, the largest of the three sites that are currently on the market. Two brooks move southerly across the site, joining a network of rivers that eventually flow into the Blackstone River. The site is bordered by privately held land on all sides, including large tracts to the west and residential parcels to the north and east. The site is 18 miles from Interstate 90, and 10 miles from I-395. The total cost is land is \$2.5 million or \$4,854/acre.

Figure 5: Douglas (Southwest Main) site location



The second site is in the northwestern corner of Douglas, bordered by the towns of Webster, to the West, and Oxford, to the north (Figure 6). The primary access to the site is via Cliff Street, a small road segment the only briefly crosses into Douglas. Cliff street is also known as Sutton Road as it passes through Webster and Joe Jenny Road through Oxford. The Cliff street site was brought to our attention by Douglas Town Officials following the release of the Phase I report. The site, as proposed by the town, is comprised of over a dozen individual parcels totaling 855 acres of largely undisturbed forest. There are several listed owners of the various parcels, including a sizable parcel owned by the town and several whose owner is currently unknown. However, the vast majority (roughly 75%) is owned by a single private individual, including the most feasible primary access point from Cliff Road. The property includes a small pond, and several brooks, and some varied terrain. However, the vast majority of the site is relatively flat and dry. The site is less than 6 minutes drive from Exit 2 of Interstate I-395, the most likely route for north bound travelers, and less than 10 minutes drive from I-395 Exit 4, which would likely be the preferred route for travels from the north. Neither route travels through predominantly residential neighborhoods. The site is not currently listed on the market, and there is no known asking price.

Figure 6: Douglas (Cliff Street) site location



Section IV: Evaluation of Candidate Sites by Factor

Agricultural Character

The depth of the agricultural character of each candidate site is important to understand because of the nature of the project. A community may be more welcoming and in fact embrace a horse park if they are already agriculturally minded. Of the three communities, Spencer and West Brookfield are both Right to Farm communities and have an established Agricultural Commission. Douglas has neither. However, none of the three towns has a Farm Agent, who is responsible for insuring that the town adheres to the principals of the Right to Farm Act. Because of their rural geography, there are between 25 and 35 working farms within 15 miles of each site. However, Spencer has the largest number of working farms within its borders. All three towns boast farmers markets, but Spencer is the only town to host an agricultural festival.

Table 6: Evaluation of Agricultural Character

Criteria	Spencer, McCormick Road	West Brookfield, Beaman Road	Douglas, Southwest Main Street	Douglas, Cliff Street
Right to Farm?	Yes	Yes	No	No
Working farms in Town	3	2	1	1
Working farms w/in 15 miles	~25	~35	~30	~30
Horse farms in Town	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4-H is active	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Farmers Organized (FFA/Grange)	No	No	No	No
State Park/Forest Nearby	Adjacent	Adjacent	2.3 mi	Adjacent
Agricultural High School Nearby	No	No	No	No
Acres under Ch. 61 in Town	4291 acres	3584 acres	4047 acres	4047 acres
USDA Eligible	Some	Some	Some	Some
Farmers Market	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Town Agricultural Festivals	Yes	No	No	No

There are horse farms located in each town, but none has an active Grange association. There are 4-H chapters situated in both Spencer and Douglas, however their membership base could span larger than the town itself. Although West Brookfield does not have a 4-H chapter, it is very likely that 4-H members are present in the community. There are no agricultural high schools near any of the candidate sites.

Not only is it important for the facility to have the space it needs, but it's important to understand the access to state and federal land for possible use by the facility, such as offering extended riding trails to visitors. Both the Spencer and West Brookfield sites have state/federal land adjacent to the available parcel(s). The Cliff Street site in Douglas is also adjacent to state land. At the Southwest Main Street site in Douglas the closest state/federal land is about 2.3 miles away. Chapter 61 land in all three towns is very prevalent. Spencer holds the most acreage under Chapter 61 at about 4300. Both West Brookfield and Douglas have around 4000 acres under Chapter 61. Lastly, based on the breadth of programs and funds provided by USDA Rural Development, all three towns are eligible for some funds.

Town Governance

Town governance is a critical factor when considering stability and political backing for a project. All three towns have a stable Select Board and Planning Board, indicating general support for past municipal planning efforts as well as the town’s capacity to carry out long term planning. However, only Spencer has a professional planner on the town staff. Both Spencer and Douglas possess an Economic Development Advisory Committee, generally indicating a more welcome environment for economic development.

Table 7: Evaluation of Town Governance

Criteria	Spencer, McCormick Rd	West Brookfield, Beaman Rd	Douglas, Southwest Main Street	Douglas, Cliff Street
Stable Select board	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Professional Management	No	Yes	No	No
High Investment-Grade Rating	Yes (Aa3)	Yes (AA-)	Yes (Aa3)	Yes (Aa3)
Stable Planning Board	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Professional Planner	Yes	No	No	No
Economic Development Advisory Committee	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Farm Agent	No	No	No	No

Branding/Community Character

Each town possess its own unique character that qualifies it as a good candidate for the horse park and the assortment of characteristics vary between each town. Both Spencer and West Brookfield have median household incomes (MHI) of \$60,943 and \$57,381, respectively. Spencer’s MHI is about 90% of the state median with West Brookfield’s closer to 85%. Douglas, on the other hand, is has an MHI of \$84,616 (125% of Massachusetts median). Of the three communities, West Brookfield has the most highly rated schools according to standard metrics. Their elementary school falls within the 71st percentile of statewide performance and their high school falls within the 49th percentile. The other two community’s schools are slightly below average compared to statewide benchmarks.

All three towns are members of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, yet Douglas is not considered an active member. However, all three towns are part of an active Chamber of Commerce. Spencer and West Brookfield are members of Chamber of Central Massachusetts South and Quaboag Hills Chamber. Douglas is part of the Blackstone Valley Chamber. Only West Brookfield has aesthetic design standards within their zoning bylaws which relate to major open space residential development. Both Spencer and Douglas have minor aesthetic design standards relating to parking, driveways, lighting, and signage.

Table 8: Evaluation of Branding/Community Character

Criteria	Spencer, McCormick Rd.	West Brookfield, Beaman Rd.	Douglas, Southwest Main St.	Douglas, Cliff St.
Middle/High Income Households	Lower Middle	Lower Middle	Upper Middle	Upper Middle
Good Public Schools	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair
Active in Regional Planning Agency	Yes	Yes	Not Active	Not Active
Active Chamber of Commerce	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Compatible Tourist Attractions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community Preservation Act	No	No	No	No
Historic Attributes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Aesthetic Design Standards	No	Yes	No	No

All three towns have compatible tourist attractions, such as wildlife refuges, water parks, and historical sites. Spencer, West Brookfield, and Douglas have 5, 6, and 7 Priority Heritage Landscapes (PHL) as designated by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation Heritage and Landscape Inventory Program. These are landscapes deemed by the State and by local community members as particularly worthy of preservation due to their beauty and historical significance. None of the towns have passed the Community Preservation Act (CPA) in the past and they were not on the most recent ballot this fall. The CPA is “a smart growth tool that helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities.” Funds are raised through “the imposition of a surcharge of not more than 3% of the tax levy against real property.” Towns who vote to implement this tax has a vision for the future of their town and are willing to sacrifice a little of their own earnings for the good of the town.

Planning Compatibility

The ideal candidate town will have compatibility between their long- and short-term planning goals and objectives and the goals and objectives of the horse park project. Of the three towns, Spencer and Douglas have an active master plan that supports growth. Spencer and West Brookfield’s master plan also supports open space conservation. However, none of the towns’ master plans actively support agricultural uses. There is mention of supporting rural character in Spencer, but in relation to open space and low density development. In West Brookfield, the master plan mainly uses a conservation lens for looking at agriculture. With Douglas only about 14% developed, it would seem there is a rural character to the town, which there is, yet there is no real support of agricultural uses within their master plan. Another important aspect of the master plan for this project is a supportive economic development chapter. West Brookfield is the only town which has this type of chapter in their master plan. Spencer’s economic development chapter highlights service/retail and industrial/commercial sectors as areas that need improvement. Douglas’ economic development chapter focuses on job creation and increasing density in their village centers.

Table 9: Evaluation of Planning Compatibility

Criteria	Spencer, McCormick Rd.	West Brookfield, Beaman Rd.	Douglas, Southwest Main St.	Douglas, Cliff St.
Master plan (MP) supports growth	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
MP supports agricultural uses	No	No	No	No
MP supports open space conservation	Yes	Yes	No	No
MP has supportive Economic Development Chapter	No	Yes	Minimum	Minimum
Capital plan supports ag. uses	No	No	No	No
Capital budget supports ag. uses	No	No	No	No
Mixed-use zoning options	No	No	No	No
Aesthetic site planning regulations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Douglas, the only town that has a Capital Improvement Plan, allocates money for municipal buildings and equipment. However, none of the three towns’ capital budgets support agricultural uses. Zoning in the three candidate towns does not provide useable mixed-use options. There is a mixed-use provision in the Town Center of Spencer. This is the only bylaw manifestation for mixed-use in the three towns. Lastly, all three towns have aesthetic site planning regulations.

Infrastructure

The existing infrastructure in each town, such as major access roads, airports, water, sewer, gas, and electricity, is a very important consideration when looking for the most suitable site. Douglas is the closest to a North/South interstate, with the Cliff Street site approximately four miles from I-395 and the Southwest Main Street site 10 miles from I-395. West Brookfield is the closest to an East/West Interstate (I-90, 11.5 miles). Spencer is the closest to a North/South state route (Rt. 31, 1.5 miles) and West Brookfield is the closest to an East/West state route (Rt. 9, 1 mile). As for airports, Spencer is the closest site to both a commercial (Worcester Regional, 8.7 miles) and private (Spencer Airport, 2.7 miles) airport. Roads and airports make it easier to develop and ship freight, and provide easier access for potential future visitors of the horse park.

In order to develop in a rural area, ample water, sewer, gas, and electricity must be available. All three towns have a water system in place, but Spencer is the only town with excess water capacity. More specifically, its capacity is about 2.3 million gallons per day (gpd) but it only draws about 1.3 million gpd. West Brookfield installed a new wellfield and pump station in 2012, but its excess capacity is unclear. Spencer and Douglas both have a sewer system in place, yet only Douglas has excess capacity (currently at 40-50%). In terms of gas, Spencer is the only town that has access to a gas pipeline (Tennessee Pipeline).

Table 10: Evaluation of Infrastructure

Criteria	Spencer, McCormick Road	West Brookfield, Beaman Road	Douglas, Southwest Main St.	Douglas, Cliff Street
Closest North/South Interstate	I-190 (13 mi)	I-290/395 (25 mi)	I-395 (10 mi)	I-395 (4 mi)
Closest East/West Interstate	I-90 (14 mi)	I-90 (11.5 mi)	I-90 (18 mi)	I-90 (11 mi)
Closest North/South State Rd.	Rt. 31 (1.5 mi)	Rt. 32 (3 mi)	Rt. 122 (7 mi)	Rt. 12 (4 mi)
Closest East/West State Rd.	Rt. 9 (3.3 mi)	Rt. 9 (1 mi)	Rt. 16 (3 mi)	Rt. 16 (3.5 mi)
Closest Commercial Airport	Worcester Regional (8.7 mi)	Worcester Regional (24.5 mi)	TF Green (25.6 mi)	Worcester Regional (16.2 mi)
Closest Municipal or Private Airport	Spencer Airport (2.7 mi)	Ware Airport (6.2 mi)	Sky Glen (5 mi)	Sky Glen (17.2 mi)
Water system in place	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Excess water capacity	Yes	Some	Limited	Limited
Sewer system in place	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Excess sewer capacity	No	No	Yes	Yes
Gas pipe line	Yes	No	No	No
Municipal electrical utility	National Grid	National Grid	National Grid	National Grid
Excess power capacity	National Grid	National Grid	National Grid	National Grid
Potential for solar/wind	Unfeasible	Unknown	Failed Proposal	Failed Proposal
Fiber-optic internet service	Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard

Electricity in all three towns is provided by National Grid; no town has a municipal electric utility. However, the potential for alternative energy is present in some capacity. Spencer is conducting a feasibility study for putting solar on its landfill, but wind power has been deemed unfeasible through studies for the town. There have been proposals for wind power in Douglas, but they have failed. Lastly, all three towns have DSL and cable available in their region but no community wide wi-fi.

Connectivity

A quality that contributes to the success of a new development is its connectivity to complementary activities and amenities. In this project, we looked proximity to other equestrian-related activities and amenities as well as other tourist attractions (Table 11).

Table 11: Evaluation of Connectivity

Criteria	Spencer, McCormick Road	West Brookfield, Beaman Road	Douglas, Southwest Main St.	Douglas, Cliff Street
Equestrian				
Nearest large-animal hospital	1.5 mi	12 mi	7 mi	15.4 mi
Nearest horse retirement home	20 mi	13.4 mi	18.5 mi	12 mi
Nearest equestrian training	10.6 mi	20.6 mi	13.2 mi	8.7 mi
Nearest equestrian competition	33 mi	25 mi	22 mi	25.4 mi
Other				
Nearest 3-star Hotel	9.5 mi	14.3 mi	14 mi	9.9 mi
Nearest 18-hole golf course	4 mi	5.8 mi	5.5 mi	5 mi
Nearest national historic site	11 mi	26 mi	16.5 mi	12.2 mi
Nearest ski area	23 mi	28 mi	38.8 mi	35.5 mi

Proximity to existing equestrian activities and amenities helps ensure that the horse park is entering a community where equestrian culture is already present, and likely appreciated. There may also be spillover benefits from the clustering of similar activities, as the Horse Park will help establish the region as a center for equestrian agriculture, possibly attracting other supporting businesses (such as breeding farms, stables, and equipment and feed suppliers) to the area. All three sites are within a reasonable distance of variety of supporting and complimentary equine activities.

Another important aspect of a successful new development is the connectivity to other tourist attractions and supporting enterprises (such as hotels). It is well known that recreational visitors are more likely to travel greater distances, and stay longer, in areas where they can participate in a variety of desired activities. Spencer has the nearest 3-star hotel (Hampton Inn Auburn, 9.5 miles), 18-hole golf course (Bay Path Golf Course, 4 miles), national historic site (American Antiquarian Society, 11 miles), and ski area (Wachusett Mountain, 23 miles). West Brookfield and Douglas have 3-star hotels nearby, about five miles further than Spencer (Comfort Inn & Suites Colonial, 14.3 miles; Hampton Inn Auburn, 14 miles respectively). They also have golf courses nearby (Bay Path Golf Course, 5.8 miles; Blackstone National Golf Club, 5.5 miles respectively). These tourist attractions provide visitors with many year round options to couple with their trip to the horse park.

Market Factors

To ensure that there is a population pool in the vicinity of the candidate sites for which could be potential visitors, we looked at population, percent of households that have a household income above the US median of \$51,795, as well as the share of households exceeding the 80th percentile U.S. household of \$73,000. We evaluate household incomes at different distances from the site (10, 20, and 50 miles of the site).

Spencer has the largest population within 10 and 20 miles of the site (180,156 people, 806,804 people respectively). However, Douglas has the largest population within 50 miles of their site (6,692,428 people), largely due to their close proximity to both Boston and Providence. The distance-based analysis is based on town-level data from the U.S. Census, and thus both Douglas sites show common values.

Table 12: Evaluation of Market Factors

Criteria	Spencer, McCormick Road	West Brookfield, Beaman Road	Douglas, Southwest Main St.	Douglas, Cliff Street
Population				
10 miles	180,156	46,074	135,861	135,861
20 miles	806,804	468,142	629,602	629,602
50 miles	5,271,645	4,918,130	6,692,428	6,692,428
Share of Households above US Median Income				
10 miles	57.7	57.3	61.5	61.5
20 miles	60.7	59.4	49.4	49.4
50 miles	62.5	60.9	60.9	60.9
Share of Households above 80 th percentile of US Income				
10 miles	39.8	40.1	44	44
20 miles	43.8	41.8	32.6	32.6
50 miles	46.4	44.7	45	45

The US Median Household Income (MHI) is \$51,795, and the 80th percentile of the US MHI is \$73,000. Douglas has the largest percentage of households (61.5%) with a MHI above the national median within 10 miles. It also has the largest percentage of households (44%) with a MHI above the 80th US percentile within 10 miles. However, access to the Cliff Street site avoids major residential neighborhoods. Within 20 miles of the site, Spencer has the largest percentage of households with incomes above the national median and 80th percentiles. All three towns have about the same percentage of households (about 61%) with a MHI above the national median within 50 miles of their sites.

Site Characteristics

This final category focuses on the characteristics of the sites themselves: acreage, access, immediate surroundings, land use restrictions, terrain, and available utilities. Of these, the most influential pertain to acreage, access, and terrain.

Table 13: Evaluation of Site Characteristics

	Spencer, McCormick Road	West Brookfield, Beaman Road	Douglas, Southwest Main St.	Douglas, Cliff Street
Acres on site	192	289	515	855
Adjacent acres public open space	480	869	0	1,171
Potential envelope	672	1,158	515	2,026
Water/sewer on-site	No	No	No	No
Electricity at street	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Existing structures	Yes	No	No	No
Access via non-residential areas	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Agricultural/forested surroundings	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Incompatible land uses adjacent	No	No	Yes	No
Proximate to state park	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Terrain flat/Terrain dry	No/Yes	No/Yes	Yes/No	Yes/No
61/61A protections in place	Yes	No	Yes	Unknown

Adjacent public open space allows for core uses, such as recreational and competitive trail riding, to take place in appropriately natural settings; it also serves as a buffer between the horse park and other privately held land. Figures 7 through 10 provide detailed views of each site with adjacent public land. At 515 acres, the Southwest Main Street site in Douglas is the largest of the three that are currently on the market. However, it is the only one without any public open space along its borders. The second Douglas site (Cliff Street) is even larger (855 acres) and is adjacent to an expansive Douglas state forest to the south and the Mine Brook Wildlife Management Area to the west. This is much larger than what would likely be required for a horse park and its affiliated on-site activities. However, the Cliff Street site is not currently on the market, and is actually comprised of 49 separate parcels. Most of the parcels (29) belong to a single landowner, and cover approximately 85 percent of the total acreage of the proposed site.

The 192-acre parcel in Spencer is the smallest of the four, but is adjacent to 480 acres of compatible public open space to the north, nearly evenly split between the Worcester County 4-H and the Spencer

State Forest. While smaller than desired for the proposed Horse Park, proximity to nearby public land could alleviate the need to provide recreational trails on site, assuming suitable arrangements can be made. Furthermore, the Town also believes that the owners of several large abutting parcels might be willing to sell. In West Brookfield, the 289-acre parcel is adjacent to approximately 870 acres of wildlife management areas and conservation land, the vast bulk of which is the Coy Hill Wildlife Management Area. As a result, the potential envelope for Horse Park activities is 1,158 acres in West Brookfield, 672 acres in Spencer, and 515 acres in Douglas. In all cases, the total acreage would likely be suitable for the Horse Park's needs.

Accessing the site is an important part of a visitor's experience of the Horse Park, and an equally important factor in securing public support for the facility. The proposed facility will generate vehicular traffic throughout the year for a variety of events, so sites that rely on access through residential areas will continually disrupt local traffic patterns. Furthermore, access roads that have been built primarily for residential use are unlikely to provide the level of service and lane width necessary to accommodate the trucks and trailers that are a part of equestrian travel, especially where turns are required.

At the Southwest Main Street site in Douglas, the site access from I-395 is problematic, leading motorists through the center of town and then through residential neighborhoods. However, the Cliff Street site in Douglas has excellent access. The primary entrance is just a short drive from two exits along Interstate 395 and anticipated traffic flows would likely not disrupt existing residential areas on roads with a high level of service. The Spencer site is also highly accessible. Although the primary route proceeds through some residential areas, visitors accessing the site from the Mass Pike can bypass the town center by way of Route 49. In West Brookfield, the site is just off Route 9.

Finally, the four sites have some differences with respect to terrain. Ideally, sites will be well-drained, gently sloping, and picturesque. The Southwest Main Street site in Douglas while flat, is also in the low-lying corner of the town. As a result, the brooks that cross the site also feed some wetlands that can make site engineering and impact mitigation far costlier than would be desired. The terrain for the Cliff Street site is varied and includes a pond and several running brooks. However, the vast majority of the site is dry and relatively flat. Furthermore, the site is at a slightly higher elevation than surrounding properties, and there is available water and sewer capacity in Douglas. Given its proximity, it is likely that water service would be provided by the neighboring Town of Oxford, assuming that Oxford has excess capacity and that it is willing to service the property. Although new pipes and a pumping station would be required to service the properties. In sum, we do not believe the site would require extensive water, sewer, road or other infrastructural improvements.

In Spencer, the rolling landscape makes for a number of scenic opportunities, and the brook on the eastern edge is well-drained along the site's border. In West Brookfield, the landscape is most suitable: upland, with slopes draining off the site to the south, the high point along the west of the site, and gradual slopes downward along the north and west through much of the public open space.

Figure 7: Spencer site, showing adjacent public land (Worcester County 4-H and Spencer State Forest)

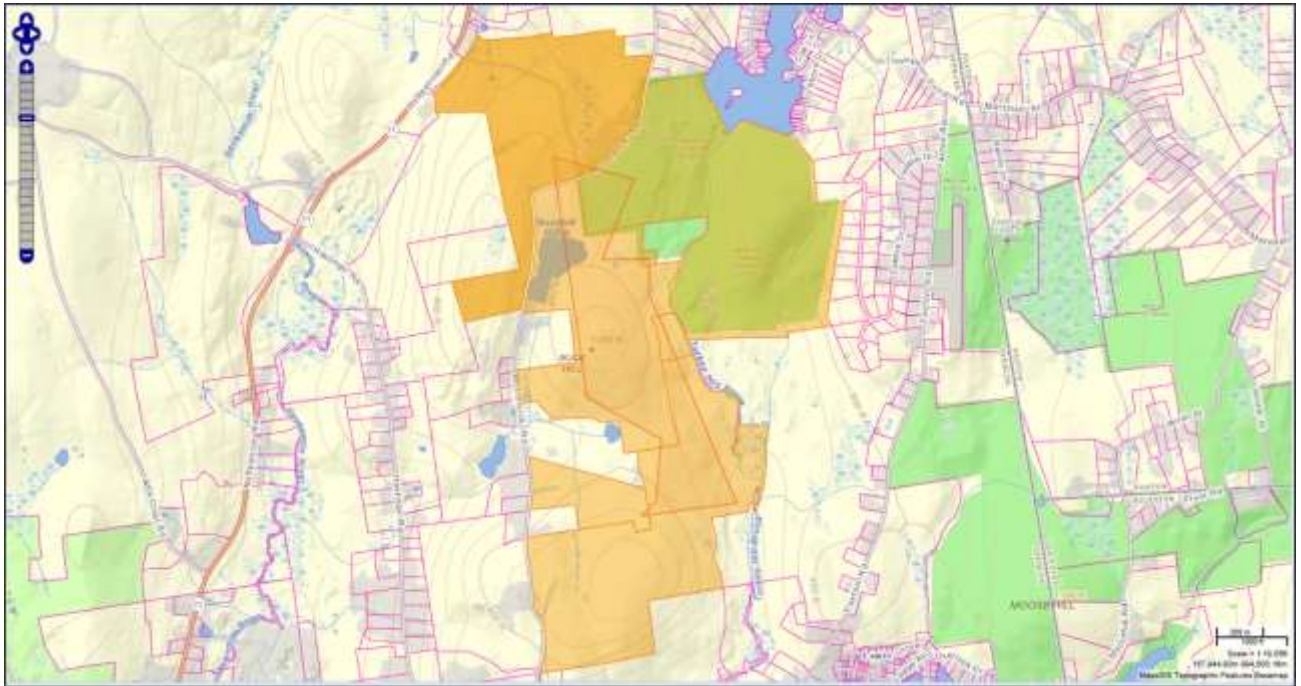


Figure 8: West Brookfield site, showing adjacent public land (Coy Hill Wildlife Management Area)

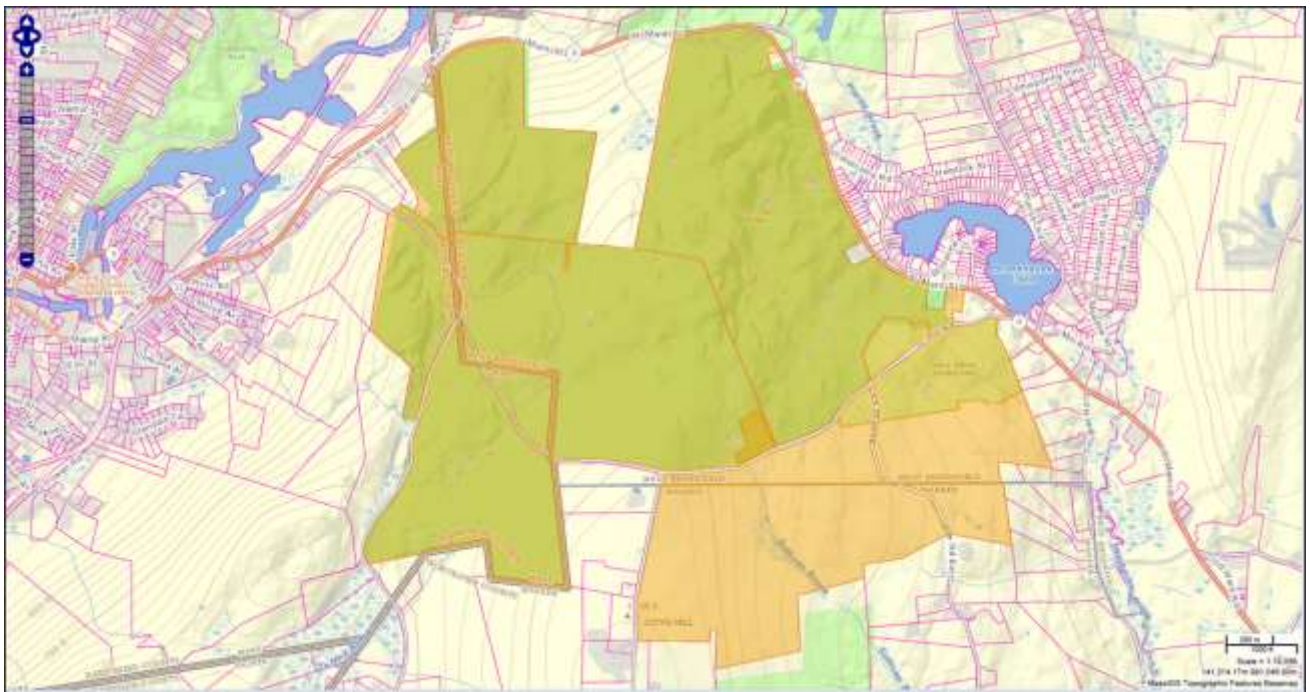
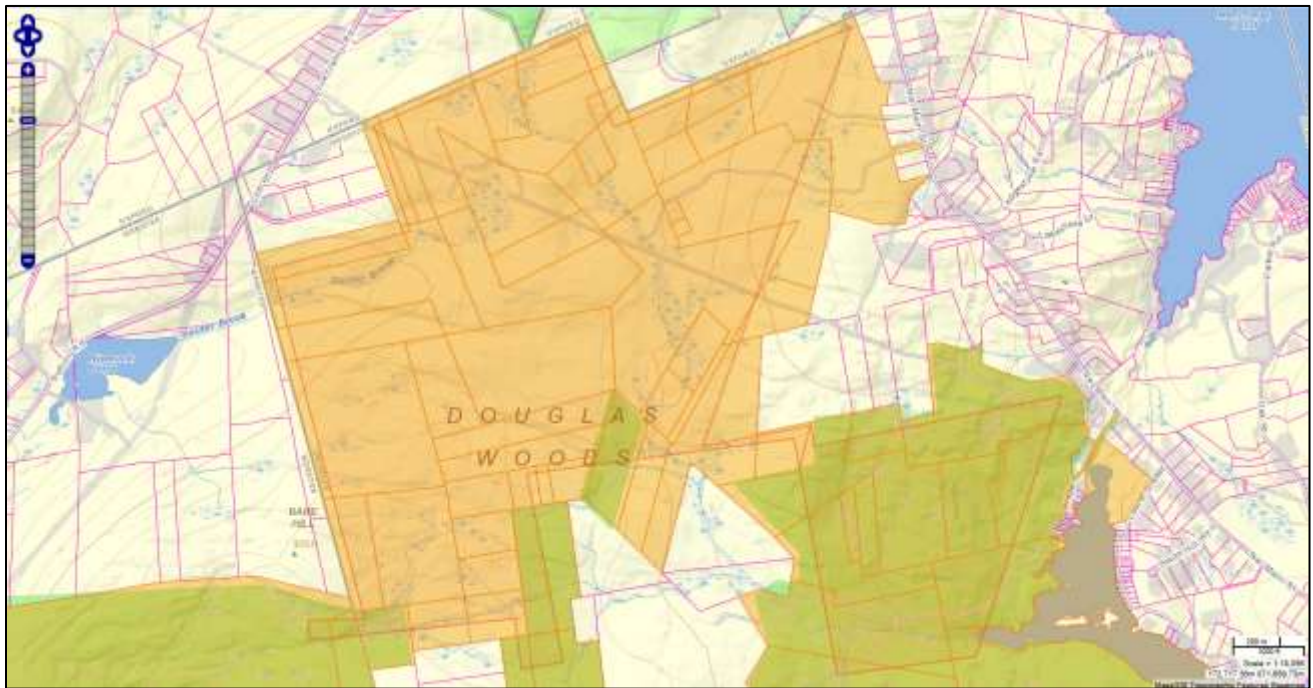


Figure 9: Douglas, Southwest Main Street site, showing no adjacent public land



Figure 10: Douglas, Cliff Street site, showing adjacent public land (Mine Brook and Douglas State Forest)



Section V: Summary of Findings

After applying the checklist, visiting the sites and interviewing local leaders, our summary assessment is presented below.

Douglas

The Town of Douglas is a growing, well managed and increasingly affluent community that is the home of an extensive number of equestrian riders and stables. It is within a relative short drive to major population centers Boston, Worcester and Providence and has relatively quick interstate access to distant points. Of the three communities reviewed, it has the greatest market potential for capturing affluent patrons and users. The two sites examined are well landscaped, have more than enough on-site acreage, and have, at least in part, an agricultural patina that would help to enhance the desired character for the park and center. While these are all positive points there are problematic issues. The first site examined, on Southeast Main Street, would require extensive water, sewer and road infrastructural improvements that would ultimately transform an increasingly affluent area of single family residential homes placed along winding rural roads and a quiet wooded setting. The property is also marked by extensive wetlands that would have to be protected and would reduce the buildable footprint of the site.

The second potential site in Douglas consists of an 855 square foot parcel under multiple owners along the northerly border of the town. The site has quick access to Interstate 395 and State Route 146. There is available water and sewer capacity in the area, but pipes and a pumping station would be required to service the properties. It is rural, largely forested, undeveloped and separate from residential neighborhoods. The topography consists of a gently rolling terrain, some wetlands and a small pond. All of these features could be easily incorporated into the site with minimal difficulty. The Douglas State Forest connects to the site and, due to its riding trails, would add a great amenity to the park and center. As noted in the comments of the first site, Douglas is a growing town that is quite close to the Worcester, Boston and Providence markets and the town is very enthusiastic over the possibility of hosting the park and center. There are two critical issues concerning this site. First, it is not currently on the market. Secondly, with five private owners of the land in the proposed site, negotiations to purchase the property could be lengthy and complicated. While the properties overwhelmingly meet the site requirements for the park, the ownership issues appear to be a “deal breaker.” Unless the owners all agree to sell, we do not recommend that it be a candidate for further consideration.

West Brookfield

The Town of West Brookfield, from an agricultural, pastoral perspective, offers the most attractive setting of the three communities studied. With rolling hills, a well-protected village center and exquisite town common and hundreds of acres of cattle and active farm lands, it has the character of the quintessential New England rural town village. Indeed, the site is so rural and so removed from other activities that it would readily become a contained destination and have minimal impact, beyond traffic, on the community. As with Douglas, and Spencer, its leaders expressed enthusiastic interest in the project. What’s more, the Town is now embarking on a new master planning effort: there is little doubt it would be able to examine how the park and track could be crafted to fit into its long-term interests. While east-west running State Route 9 is just minutes away from the site, it is the most distant of the three communities from major north-south running highways and interstates. What’s more, the site in question is hilly in part and would require some excavation and other site work before it met both the

needs of the project as well as environmental protection requirements. The absence of public water and sewer service in the area is also an issue that would have to be addressed.

In sum, the leadership of West Brookfield would be quite pleased to further explore the project. The character of the community is a perfect match for the proposed character of the site and there would appear to be minimal problems with neighboring land uses. The site, while not as close as Douglas to coastal cities, has the advantage of being closer to the Springfield and Hartford markets. It is our opinion that this location is worthy of further examination.

Spencer

The leadership of the Town of Spencer expressed great enthusiasm for the project. From its major road, State Route 9, the town has the look of a recovering mill town. However, once one moves into the northern part of the community, it has all of the beauty of a New England rural village. It is the home of a large number of farms and stables and the site of the Worcester County 4-H equestrian center is nearby the site. It is possible that the equestrian center could work in tandem with 4-H to offer coordinated educational programs, events, and expand area equestrian recreational activities. While lacking direct access to interstates, it is laced with several state-numbered highways. While the town has additional capacity in its water and sewer systems, the existing infrastructure would have to be extended to meet the demands of the park and center. The site is the smallest of the four, with only 192 acres listed. However, proximity to nearby state parks could alleviate the need to provide recreational trails on site, assuming suitable arrangements can be made. There are also several large abutting parcels nearby, with owners who may be willing to sell.

In sum, Spencer has the professional and political leadership in place to guide the project to completion, has the rural character and complimentary uses that would be supportive for the project and is the most centered location of the three communities in terms of a New England market. In a final analysis, this site deserves to be further examined.

We recommend that both the Spencer and West Brookfield properties be further considered for the site of a horse park and equestrian center for the Commonwealth. The West Main Street site in Douglas should not be considered. The Cliff Street site in Douglas should only be considered following negotiations with existing owners and their willingness to sell.

Final Thoughts

All of the sites have weaknesses and strengths. From a weakness perspective, all will require negotiations over purchase and sale agreements, environmental impact reviews, infrastructure, and investment in site preparations. More specifically, none is in shovel ready condition where sewer and waterlines are connected to the sites and where the ground is cleared of forest and flat enough for construction.

From the perspective of strengths, the Douglas (Cliff Street), Spencer and West Brookfield sites all appear to meet the site criteria to various degrees. However, the Cliff Street site in Douglas should only be considered for further negotiations if the owners become willing sellers.