

# Southampton, MA. Overview



**Southampton**, Massachusetts (pop. 6,224) is a 28.96 square mile community located in Hampshire County on the western uplands of the Connecticut River Valley in Western Massachusetts. The town straddles two of the states' major watersheds, those of the Connecticut and the Westfield Rivers. The topography rises from the east to the west, and the Pomeroy and Little Mountains are visible landmarks from distant neighboring towns. Traditionally a farming community,



Southampton is a rural residential community that serves as a gateway to the countryside. The town is bordered by expanding urban centers (Westfield, Holyoke, and Easthampton) along the valley side predominately to the east and south, and by sparsely-populated villages (Montgomery and Westhampton) to the north and west. The local Wm. E. Norris school is home to Pre-K through 6<sup>th</sup> grade and Southampton is one of five towns comprising the Hampshire Regional School District. Students attend middle and high school in neighboring Westhampton.

Today, Southampton is a community of commuters and a few farmers. Despite the loss of farms, residents perceive Southampton as a rural community with a small-town character. Residents place a high value on the remaining farmland and open space and continue to work to preserve and protect these prized resources. Currently, it is not agriculture but services, trade, and construction that comprise the bulk of its economic base.

Southampton's positive attributes of high quality of life and close proximity to urban areas make it a desirable place to live. These characteristics also create development pressures that are altering Southampton's rural character. It is one of the Commonwealth's most rapidly growing towns. Determination of the appropriate jobs/housing balance is expected to guide the community's future development.



**Town Finances**

The FY24 Operating Budget was approved for \$20.2 million at the most recent Town Meeting. The Town is working to create a fiscally sustainable budget that stays within the limits of Proposition 2½ and does not rely on one-time funding sources. This will include managing fiscally sustainable collective bargaining agreements between the Town and the Town’s three unions. Southampton wishes to remain an affordable place to live and a desirable place to raise a family and is working on ways to determine ways to achieve this goal.

The Town received \$1.8 million in ARPA Grant Funding which has so far been committed to one-time items such as the COA Senior Center Feasibility Study, Public Safety Feasibility Study, COVID test kits and vaccine clinics, Premium Pay for Town Employees during the COVID Emergency, hiring of a behavioral specialist and special education teacher for the primary school, a Master Plan for the Park, and some small business assistance for loss of revenue during COVID. Additionally, other infrastructure-type projects have been awarded ARPA funds: the water main replacement along a portion of Rte. 10, telephone VOiP installation and a financial software upgrade for Town Hall, an update of the town’s personnel classification and compensation plan, and matching funds towards State or Federal grants.

Regarding revenue, the Town brings in about 74% of its revenue through property taxes, 16% in State Aid, 8% in Local Receipts, and 2% from other funding sources.

**Ongoing Projects**

Long-Term Capital Improvements: Ongoing capital improvements to essential Town buildings remain a top priority for Southampton. The Town is currently in the process of building a new Public Safety Facility as well as a new expanded Council on Aging Facility. Approvals for land acquisition and building design will likely be topics for a Special Town Meeting this fall, and the Annual Town Meeting next May. Additionally, two significant grant-funded projects are underway and will be the focus of the next five years: completing the 3.5 miles of shared-use bike path between Easthampton and Westfield and constructing a 0.42-mile, shared-use walkway from the Rte. 10/Pomeroy Meadow Rd. intersection to the Wm. E. Norris school. The town has recently completed replacement of the East St. bridge with a million-dollar MassWorks grant. Since East St. itself serves as a busy commuter route for local traffic going towards Easthampton, Holyoke and I-91, we are now in the planning stages for its re-design and scheduling on the MassDOT project (TIP) list.

## Planning Resources

Southampton, over the past few years has completed and had approved, a Master Plan, an Open Space and Recreation Plan and carried out a Community Building Resilience Matrix exercise as part of the Municipal Vulnerability Planning process. We are currently updating our Hazard Mitigation Plan. We have recently revamped the town's website [Home - Town of Southampton](#) and have completed the codification of our general and zoning bylaws with ECode 360—soon to go online.

## Public Safety

The Public Safety Dispatch is currently operated by the Police Department for all Fire, Police, and Emergency Medical service needs. However, this is being transferred to the Easthampton Police Department within FY24 due to a lack of qualified candidates to fill the Emergency Dispatch positions. There are on average about 11,000 calls logged annually by the Emergency Communications Department (which reports to the Chief of Police).

## Southampton Fire/EMS Department

Housed in an inadequate building dating to the 1860s, the Southampton Fire/EMS Department is dedicated to serving town residents 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Department activities include the effective and timely response of trained people and equipment to fire, medical, and hazardous event



emergencies, as well as fire safety inspection and education activities. They do this with a career Fire Chief and 46 part-time/per-diem employees including firefighter/EMTs and paramedics. In addition, they utilize 6 call force firefighters.

The apparatus consists of 3 Fire Engines, 2 Ambulances, a Brush Truck, and a UTV-Trailer. There is no tanker or ladder engine. In July of 2023, upon retirement of its long-term Chief, the town initiated an external operational review of the Fire /EMS Department. That review and report was conducted by Chief Russ Anderson (Ret.) and delivered to the Select Board at its August 1<sup>st</sup> meeting. The Select Board intends to use this report to guide the department over the next ten years up to and including the selection of the next Chief by the end of calendar year 2023.

## Police Department

The police department is comprised of ten full-time police officers and typically has a roster of approximately seven to eight part-time police officers. These staffing levels ideally allow the department to divide the Town into two patrol districts with 24/7 patrol coverage in each district. The police department has always relied on part-time staff to supplement our full-time force. However, a mandate of the 2020 Massachusetts Act Relative to Justice and Accountability in Law Enforcement requires equivalent training for part-time and full-time police officers. Prior to this reform act, an

abbreviated police training academy existed for part-time officers, which allowed police departments to augment their personnel with part-time officers. As a result of this training mandate, the dependence on part-time police officers will lessen. The Southampton Police Department has already experienced the effects of this. Since calendar year 2020, part-time shift coverage for the town has declined by 54% from 4,517 shift hours in 2020 to 2,074 shift hours in 2022. Ultimately, through attrition, the town's ability to rely on part-time staff will no longer exist. Consequently, preemptive planning and action to adjust to this reality is required to maintain the same level of services.

### **Highway Department**

When fully staffed, the Highway Department employs a single shift of eight full-time hourly staff, a part-time Administrative Assistant and a full-time salaried Superintendent. All full-time employees are on call to handle Southampton's Highway and Water Department emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. As with other departments, we have had difficulty recruiting qualified mechanics and equipment operators and thus are operating with only half the required personnel. The Department is responsible for maintenance of bridges and roads which require sanding, plowing, sweeping, patching, vegetation management, grading and re-paving. Southampton has 67 miles of maintained roads. The Department also maintains our park, ball fields, library, cemetery, and other town-owned areas. They are responsible for stormwater management and operate the transfer station with a very active recycling program.

### **Water Department**

Consisting of a Superintendent and long-time water technician, this department reports to three elected Water Commissioners. The town's public water is pumped from the nationally acclaimed Barnes Aquifer groundwater at the Glendale Well. In 2020, the Water Department implemented the Easthampton water interconnection project. The new building at the well was completed with equipment to control our supply well and treatment equipment. A FEMA/MEMA - funded Manhan Water Main Replacement Project has been completed and now the Department, working with MassDOT, is replacing 10,000 feet of under-sized water main along Rte. 10. About 80% of residents are on town water. The Water Department, as with the Transfer Station, operates as an Enterprise Fund. With the recent retirement of the Superintendent, we are in the final stages of selecting his replacement.

### **Council on Aging (COA)**

The COA provides a place to promote a spirit of healthy, positive aging through education and activities for all seniors, and the community at large. According to the recent census, the current population 60+ in Southampton is nearly 2,000 (33% of total population). The current Senior Center is a small one-room facility, with a maximum capacity of 75 people which is not conducive for its multiple, simultaneous activities. Nonetheless, the Center provides a variety of classes and opportunities to socialize with friends. There is a new team in place with a Director, Program Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator and the new position of Outreach Coordinator. A wheelchair lift van provided by the Franklin Regional Transit Authority is available to transport seniors to medical appointments and shopping. The COA relies heavily on grant funds to supplement the annual town budget provided for its basic operational needs. A primary focus for the coming year is acquiring the land, finalizing the architectural design and beginning construction on a new Senior Center.