



Frequently Asked Questions: Future of the Monson Developmental Center Property

1. What is the history of the site?

The Monson campus originated in 1854 as one of the Commonwealth’s three state almshouses established in response to the influx of impoverished Irish immigrants. In 1866 it became the State Primary School for pauper children, and in 1895 it was redesignated as the Massachusetts Hospital for Epileptics. By 1898, the earlier wood-frame almshouse and school buildings had been replaced with a masonry campus of red-brick Craftsman and Colonial Revival structures.

Between 1900 and 1940, the institution expanded into a 671-acre complex of patient wards, administrative buildings, staff housing, farm operations, and support facilities. This early-20th-century campus, along with its agricultural landscape, formed the basis for the site’s listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994. The facility reached a peak population of roughly 1,700 residents in 1968, reflecting its significance within the state’s institutional care system prior to deinstitutionalization.

After its National Register listing, the Monson Developmental Center continued operating as a residential facility for individuals with significant developmental disabilities, but its population declined steadily as Massachusetts shifted toward community-based care.

In December 2008, the Commonwealth announced the facility’s closure as part of a statewide transition to smaller group homes. At the time, Monson housed 137 residents and employed 403 staff; by 2012 only 31 residents remained. The campus officially closed on June 30, 2012, with most buildings already vacated. By closure, only 8 buildings remained in office use and 11 buildings supported maintenance, utilities, and basic operations.

Following closure, the property remained largely vacant for several years, with no immediate state reuse plan. This period ultimately set the stage for later legislative actions (2022–2024) that designated portions of the property for agricultural use, permanent conservation, and redevelopment.

2. Who currently owns the site?

Recent legislation has divided the former Monson Developmental Center property into four distinct categories of use:

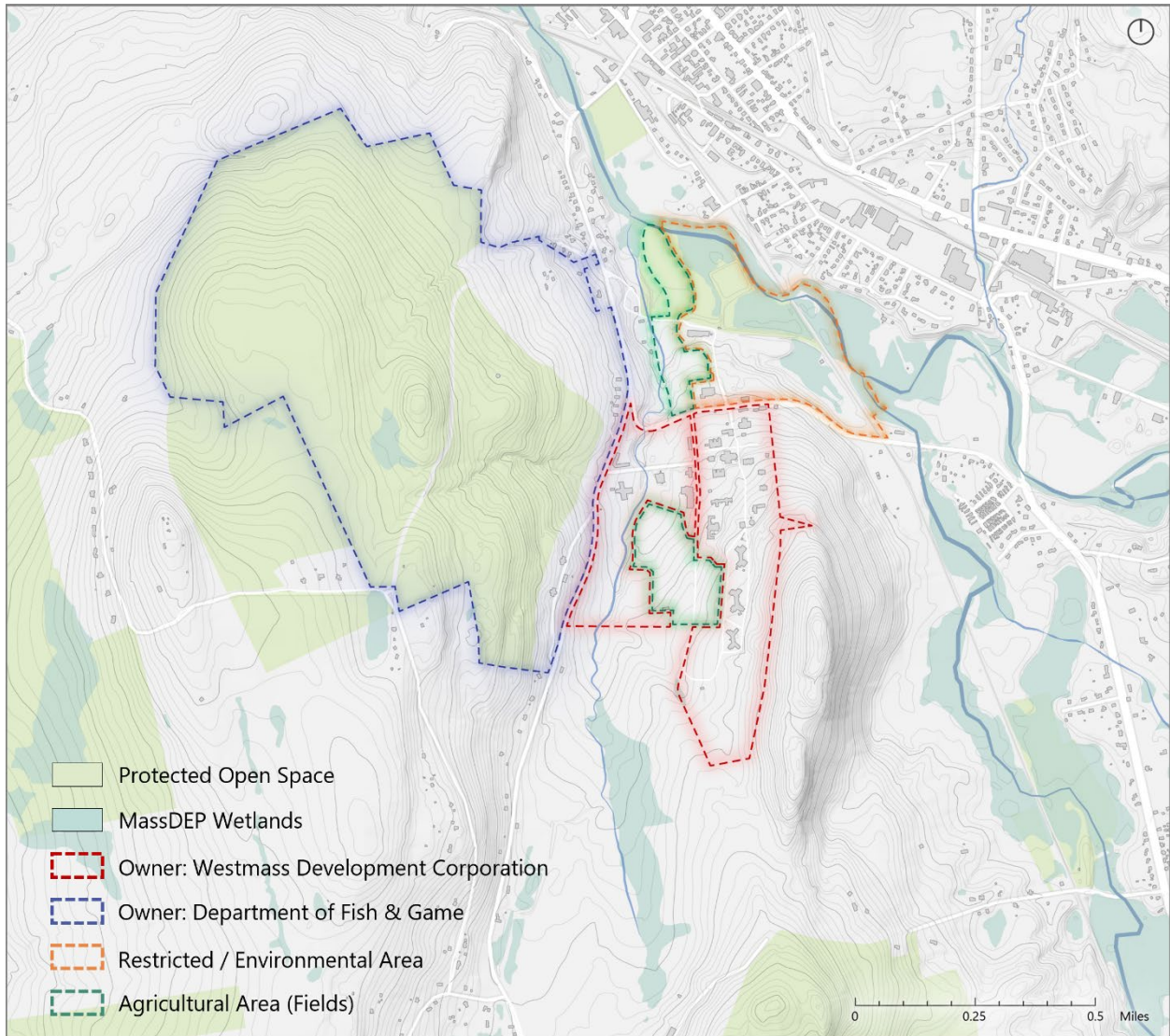
Agricultural Lands: Under Chapter 181 of the Acts of 2022, DCAMM was authorized to transfer approximately 43 acres for continued agricultural use.

Permanent Conservation Lands: The same act (Chapter 181 of 2022) authorized the transfer of approximately 458 acres to the Department of Fish and Game, preserving these lands for conservation and nature-based uses.

Redevelopment Area: Under Chapter 206 of the Acts of 2024, DCAMM was authorized to convey approximately 106 acres to Westmass for redevelopment, specifically to support future housing and commercial uses.

Restricted / Environmental Area: DCAMM retains this area on the campus, along the north of Hospital Road, which includes the former power plant and landfill area.

Together, these actions define the current legal and planning framework for the entire MDC property.



3. What is currently happening at the site?

DCAMM is currently demolishing structures on the west side of Upper Palmer Road.

Both DCAMM and Westmass are also carrying out pre-demolition investigations and environmental/structural assessments to prepare the main campus for demolition activities planned for 2026.

The Town of Monson was recently awarded a MassWorks Infrastructure Grant (\$5 million) to fund major infrastructure upgrades. This project will replace the bridge on State Hospital Road and reconstruct the roadway, water, and sewer infrastructure on both approaches to the bridge.

4. Are there any town-owned roads on the campus?

Yes. Hospital Road and Macomber Road are both town-owned.

5. Will the bridge on Hospital Road be replaced?

There are no current plans to replace the Hospital Road bridge.

6. What is the future plan for the property?

Westmass intends to present a zoning bylaw proposal to the Planning Board in December 2025 and will request that the Board hold a public hearing in January 2026. The goal is to bring the bylaw forward for a Town Meeting vote on May 11, 2026.

The proposed zoning would establish a mixed-use district, allowing a range of housing, commercial, light industrial, and institutional uses, providing the regulatory framework needed to support long-term redevelopment of the campus.

7. What types of housing are anticipated?

The proposed zoning district allows for a range of mainstream, neighborhood-scale housing types, including:

- Market-rate housing
- Senior housing
- Workforce-oriented housing
- Townhouses and cottage-style homes
- Multifamily buildings of limited height and scale (and limited to certain areas of the campus)
- Reuse of existing buildings for residential purposes

These housing types are specifically listed in the draft zoning and are consistent with typical New England mixed-use redevelopment.

8. What is not being proposed?

To address a recurring local concern:

- No large institutional residential programs, high-intensity congregate housing, and other non-traditional residential models. These uses are not permitted within the proposed zoning district and are not part of any planning discussions.
- No high-intensity industrial uses.
- No uses that resemble large institutional campuses of the past.

The bylaw limits commercial and institutional uses to neighborhood-scale, low-impact activities (e.g., offices, small retail, civic uses), further ensuring compatibility with Monson's character.

9. How will housing types be determined?

The exact mix will evolve over time and will be shaped by:

- Local market conditions
- Infrastructure phasing and costs
- Site constraints and the reuse potential of existing buildings
- Planning Board review through site plan approval and, where applicable, special permits

The zoning bylaw is intentionally designed to prevent incompatible or unwanted uses in town while providing the necessary flexibility to attract private investment in conventional housing types and businesses appropriate for Monson.

10. What are the anticipated impacts to the town?

Currently, the property does not generate local tax revenue. Once redeveloped, the site will become fully taxable, and Westmass is preparing an economic impact study to quantify anticipated fiscal benefits if a project is able to proceed following zoning adoption.

Redevelopment will introduce additional traffic, and a formal traffic impact study will be required as part of project's planning process.

Other municipal service impacts – such as police, fire/EMS, highway department, and schools – will be evaluated across all phases of planning. The scale and pace of development will depend on market conditions and on funding the significant infrastructure upgrades needed for roads, utilities, and site access.

Given these factors, full build-out of the redevelopment area may occur over a long-term horizon of up to 20 years.

11. What happens if the zoning bylaw does not pass town meeting?

Under Westmass's Purchase and Sale Agreement with DCAMM, a reverter provision is in place through June 30, 2027. If the zoning bylaw does not pass, Westmass would likely exercise its contractual right to return ("revert") the property to DCAMM.

12. What could happen if the site is "reverted?"

If the property reverts to the state, the Commonwealth has indicated it is actively pursuing the sale or transfer of surplus properties to accelerate housing production. Under the Massachusetts Affordable Homes Act (signed August 6, 2024), the state has new authority to bypass local zoning requirements when redeveloping surplus state-owned land for housing.

This means that redevelopment could proceed under a state-driven process, with less local control than would be available through a locally adopted zoning framework.