

Vision of Tomorrow

WRENTHAM MASTER PLAN

2030

PHASE I
September 2021

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September 7, 2021

The Wrentham Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and Town staff and the MAPC staff team wish to thank the many residents and businesses of Wrentham who participated in the Vision of Tomorrow: Wrentham Master Plan 2030 - Phase I planning process by coming to public meetings, responding to surveys, participating in focus groups, and showing their care and commitment to our shared future.

We hereby approve of the Vision of Tomorrow: Wrentham Master Plan 2030 – Phase I. As the planning process ends, the implementation just begins. We are committed to aligning our decisions with the plan's Vision and Goals and to implementing the Strategies. We seek to complete a comprehensive master plan and acknowledge that Phase I may be adjusted in the course of preparing the full plan, in order to promote a coordinated approach to guiding the Town's priorities, policies, and investments.

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Executive Summary

Vision of Tomorrow: Wrentham's 2030 Master Plan is a guide for the Town's policies, programs, and investments for the next 10 years, translating the values and hopes of people who live, work, and play in Wrentham into specific actions.

This plan represents the first phase of Vision of Tomorrow including the Vision Statement, Economic Development chapter, and Housing chapter. Subsequent phases will address additional topics, including Transportation and Open Space and Recreation.

Vision of Tomorrow was developed by local volunteers on the Master Plan Committee and Town of Wrentham staff with the support of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). It is based on more than a year of community engagement, including two virtual public forums, two town-wide surveys, several presentations to the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and Economic Development Commission, and focus groups.

In addition, rigorous research and analysis examined key trends and uncovered new insights into some of the challenges and opportunities for residents and businesses. This research was used to inform the plan and was referenced throughout the community engagement process. The full findings of the analysis are presented in the existing conditions assessments in the appendix.

Several main themes were identified during the planning process, including the community's deeply-held commitment to responsibly steward and protect Wrentham's beautiful land and natural resources, to continue to offer a great place to raise a family, and to support investment in the Downtown.

The Vision Statement captures these themes and the community's aspirations for the future, providing a north star for the rest of the plan.

The Goals, summarized on the following page, address the key issues of Economic Development and Housing ranging from diversifying the tax base to providing housing options to help Wrentham's aging seniors stay in the community.



Source: Diane Glass



Source: Warren Cook



Source: Diane Glass



Source: Diane Glass

The Strategies identify actionable steps to advance each of the Goals, providing guidance to members of the Board of Selectmen and Planning Board, Town staff, and other community leaders. The Strategies include zoning amendments, events, collaborations with businesses and neighboring municipalities, strategic planning, improved communications, technical assistance, priorities for staff workplans, and more.

Economic Development Goals

1. Pursue strategic and innovative strategies for new economic opportunities
2. Improve coordination and communication between businesses and the Town
3. Make Wrentham more business-friendly and attract context-appropriate development
4. Invest in the Downtown to support a walkable, attractive Town Center

Housing Goals

1. Guide development towards the Town Center and areas with existing infrastructure
2. Protect open space and discourage development of forests and fields
3. Encourage a greater variety of housing options
4. Thoughtfully promote deed-restricted Affordable Housing

The planning process itself has brought light to new issues and fostered dialogue between community members, staff, and electeds. But, the work to implement the Goals and Strategies has just begun. Everyone in Town has a role to play in ensuring the success of the plan, from referencing the shared Vision Statement as choices about the Town's future arise to investing the time to advance Strategies. *Vision of Tomorrow*, here we come!

Introduction

What is Vision of Tomorrow: Wrentham Master Plan 2030?

A Master Plan is a method of translating community values into specific actions to be completed over a period of 10 years. The planning process offers the opportunity to reflect on current conditions and aspirations for the future, and ultimately results in a policy guide that provides a framework for the priorities, programs, and physical development of a municipality.

As a Master Plan, Vision of Tomorrow is a tool for translating the values and hopes of people who live, work, and play in Wrentham into specific actions. Not everyone in Wrentham has the same goals—the process of developing Vision of Tomorrow includes sharing and considering different opinions, analyzing Census and other data, and finding a workable consensus about current conditions and where the community wants to be in the future. Based on an understanding of the current situation and the community's vision for the future, the Master Plan sets Goals and Strategies to guide the Town's policy, programs, and investment decisions.

A master plan provides the framework for regulation and is meant to be implemented by tools such as zoning bylaws, budget plans, and capital improvement programs. According to Massachusetts State statute (Massachusetts General Law Chapter 41, Section 81D), each master plan should be "designed to provide a basis for decision-making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality."

Vision of Tomorrow is the first phase of a comprehensive master plan. It was developed by the Town of Wrentham and local volunteers on the Master Plan Committee with the support of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). This first phase includes the development of a vision for the future of Wrentham, as well as Goals and Strategies for the Housing and Economic Development elements of the Master Plan. A full master plan, the completion of which depends on funding availability, will address additional topics including, but not limited to, Transportation, Land Use, Natural and Cultural Resources, Open Space and Recreation, Energy and Sustainability, and Services and Facilities. The full master plan will also include an Implementation Program that identifies entities responsible for implementing each strategy, potential funding sources, and the recommended time frame.



Source: Diane Glass

How does it affect me? How can I use it?

The table below identifies how you can use and benefit from Vision of Tomorrow, no matter who you are.

	Planning Process	Adopted Master Plan
If you are a resident...	The process provides an opportunity for all residents and stakeholders to shape the future of the Town and influence the direction and priorities of local decision-making for the next 10 years.	Vision of Tomorrow clearly identifies Goals and Strategies for specific decision-making entities, including the Planning Board. In this way, you can use Vision of Tomorrow to help keep decision-makers accountable. For the next 10 years, investments, policies, and other decisions should advance the vision of the adopted Master Plan.
If you are a local business owner...		Vision of Tomorrow outlines the Economic Development Goals and Strategies of the Town. This helps to provide an idea of what kind of businesses the community would like to see, and what to expect in terms of the support and programs that may be available to promote economic growth.
If you are a local developer...		Vision of Tomorrow outlines the Housing and Economic Development Goals of the Town. This can help provide insight and reduce uncertainty about the general type of development that the community and decision-makers might support.
If you are a local elected or volunteer...		Vision of Tomorrow reflects a public process to determine a shared vision for the future and how to get there. It is designed to guide your decisions, including investments, policies and regulations, permitting, and priorities.
If you are on Town staff...		Vision of Tomorrow reflects a public process to determine a shared vision for the future and how to get there. It is designed to guide your work plan for the next 10 years.

Planning Process

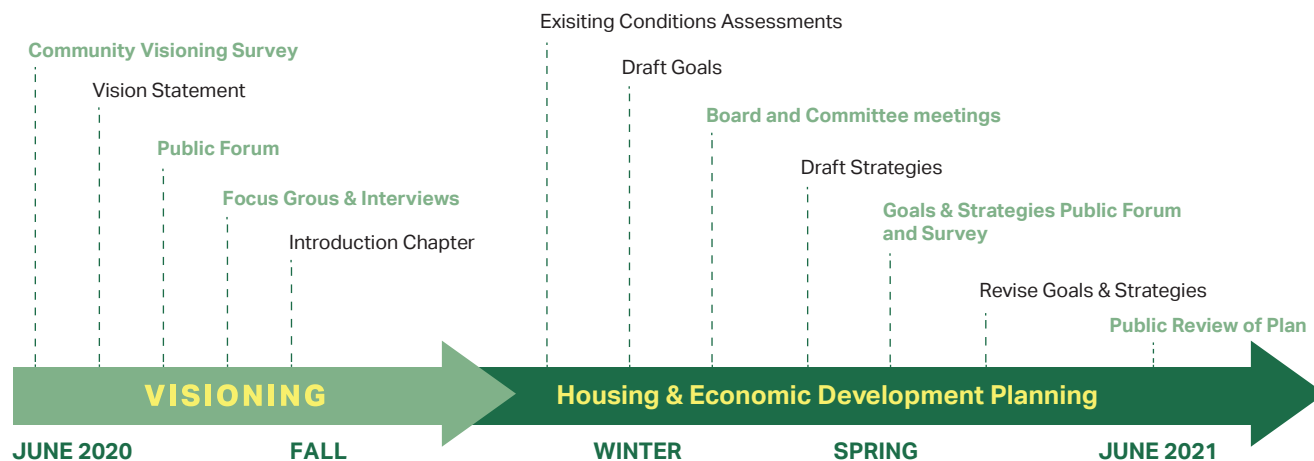
Public input is a critical component of the master planning process. During the course of preparing Vision of Tomorrow, residents, business owners, elected and appointed representatives, and others have been invited to weigh in.

This input, along with demographic, housing, economic, and spatial analysis, was synthesized by the Master Plan Committee with assistance from MAPC and used to prepare the Master Plan.

The public engagement process included the following key resources and events:

- **Project webpage:** The webpage provides background information on the master planning process, updates on recent and upcoming meetings or milestones, contact information for the Town, MAPC, and the Steering Committee, and ability to sign up for email updates.
- **Master Plan Steering Committee meetings:** The Steering Committee met 11 times between June 2020 and June 2021 to prepare for and strategize robust public engagement, review existing conditions assessments, draft goals and strategies, and review draft materials. These meetings were noticed and open to the public.
- **Presentations to Town Committees:** The Town Planner joined the meetings of Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Committee, Board of Health, School Committee, Board of Selectmen, Economic Development Commission, and Recreation Committee to introduce the planning process and invite committee members to become involved. Additional presentations to the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and Economic Development Committee provided updates on key milestones and opportunities for feedback on the goals and strategies.
- **Two town-wide surveys:** At the start of the planning process from August 11 to October 1, 2020, an online and paper survey was made available to residents and stakeholders in Wrentham. Over 1,300 people participated in the survey. The Community Visioning Survey, including a summary of the survey findings, is discussed on the following pages. A second survey focused on the draft goals and potential surveys was available from April 8 to April 26, 2021, and more than 550 participants responded.
- **Two virtual public forums:** A virtual public forum was held on September 28, 2020 to present the survey findings, review data analysis, collect feedback on the draft Vision Statement, and discuss any unidentified issues and opportunities facing the community. Forty-seven people attended. A second public forum with 53 participants was held on April 8, 2021 to present the draft goals and potential strategies for discussion and feedback.
- **Focus groups:** In order to hear from specific populations that are often underrepresented in planning processes, focus groups were held with seniors, Affordable Housing residents, residents of color, and business owners in January 2020. The focus groups were aimed at better understanding the challenges and opportunities related to housing and economic development in Wrentham, as well as the impacts of COVID-19.

Planning Timeline



What is the Metropolitan Area Planning Council?

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is under contract with the Town of Wrentham to undertake the master planning process. MAPC is the Regional Planning Agency for the 101 cities and towns that make up Greater Boston. The agency's charge is to use planning to improve Metro Boston's livability, its prosperity, safety, health, equity, and distinctive character. To that end, MAPC assists its municipalities with planning projects and acts as a regional think-tank, offering data, analysis, advocacy, and regional collaboration.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Vision of Tomorrow was prepared during the unparalleled time of a global pandemic. According to public health guidelines, all meetings and public forums were held on-line.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic's precise impacts are uncertain and still unfolding, it has clearly had devastating effects on the economy and society at large. Although the most up to date information was used wherever possible, much of the data in the existing conditions assessment does not reflect the recent and dramatic shifts in people's lives and in the economy caused by the pandemic and related public health measures. Recently released data and the short- and long-term impacts were considered in the planning process, wherever possible.

Progress Since the 2004 Master Plan

The Town's most recent Master Plan was completed in 2004. In September 2005, the Planning Board brought 22 articles to a Special Town Meeting warrant to implement recommendations from the 2004 Master Plan. Due mostly to logistical and technical difficulties, the vote on these articles were indefinitely postponed. Over the next several years, the Town struggled to address or implement the recommendations holistically. However, the Town has achieved several significant accomplishments, some of which are summarized below.

Housing

► Prepared the 2005 Housing Production Plan:

Housing Production Plans (HPP) help municipalities better understand local housing need and demand, development constraints and opportunities, and the vision for future Affordable Housing and sometimes market-rate housing. Affordable Housing refers to housing that is restricted to residents of certain income limits. Following up and supplementing the 2004 Master Plan, the Town prepared an HPP, defining specific Affordable Housing production goals, analyzing the capacity of municipal infrastructure and services to accommodate increased Affordable Housing production, and identifying specific geographic areas for future Affordable Housing growth. Consistent with the 2004 Master Plan, the HPP recommends zoning reform strategies to require a certain percentage of all new developments as Affordable Housing (also known as Inclusionary zoning), to channel new development into existing village centers and limit sprawl, and to reform other restrictive zoning requirements. In addition, it recommends reconvening the Wrentham Affordable Housing Partnership to provide leadership on Affordable Housing, as well as providing economic incentive programs for Affordable Housing development. Some of the recommendations have been implemented, including creating a new zoning district for the Village Center. Other recommendations, such as Inclusionary zoning and reconvening the Wrentham Affordable Housing Partnership have not advanced.

► Promoted Affordable Housing development:

At the time of adoption of the 2004 Master Plan, there were 147 affordable units in Wrentham, accounting for approximately 5% of the total housing units. As of 2020, there are now 485 units due to new Affordable Housing at Ledgeview, Eagle Brook, and other developments. In addition to better serving the needs of residents, the development of Affordable Housing has brought Wrentham into compliance with the Commonwealth's Chapter 40B requirements. These requirements establish a target for each municipality to ensure that 10% of each community's housing units are Affordable Housing units.

► Rezoned the town center to allow a mix of uses and improve walkability:

Based on community visioning processes in 2002 and 2012, the Town hired MAPC to lead a planning process and draft a new Village Center Zoning District in 2017. The new Zoning District for the Downtown was adopted at Town Meeting, changing the zoning bylaw to extend the historic town center into the former Crosby Valve/Tyco site, and promoted a walkable, vibrant Downtown.

► Adopted the Community Preservation Act

In 2016, voters adopted the Community Preservation Act (CPA), adding a 1% surcharge on commercial and residential tax bills. The funding is added to a community preservation fund administered for use on open space conservation, recreation, historical preservation, and

Affordable Housing (also known as “community housing”). Towns that adopt the CPA are also eligible for annual matching grants from the Massachusetts Community Preservation Trust Fund. More than 50% of municipalities in Massachusetts have passed CPA. Wrentham’s CPA funds have been used to create a playground at the Rice Complex, study stormwater runoff into Mirror Lake, restore paintings of the Wrentham resident Joseph Goss Cowell, and other projects.

Economic Development

► Rezoned Route 1 to encourage commercial development and protect natural resources

In 2018, the Town commissioned a study funded by a grant from the Mass Gaming Commission of the Route 1 corridor to examine how this high-traffic route could be better leveraged to offer local jobs and contribute real estate taxes. Based on the study, the Town rezoned the area, streamlining the various existing zoning districts to focus on two areas within the corridor. The stretch south of Thurston Street is rezoned to attract office, entertainment, and retail development, while the stretch north of Thurston Street is rezoned to protect water supply and recreational resources at the Foxborough State Forest, while encouraging limited office development.

► Adopted Tax Incentive Financing (TIF)

In 2015, Wrentham adopted Tax Incentive Financing (TIF), a public financing method that subsidizes redevelopment by incentivizing companies to invest in capital expansion and new employee growth. The TIF agreement provides a sliding scale tax break on the increase of valuation due to new investment. Specifically, TIF helps provide an incentive for Capstan Atlantic, a manufacturer of powdered metal parts, to remain in Wrentham, and promotes Wrentham’s competitiveness in the commercial market. For example, one of the reasons that Tyco Valve left Downtown Wrentham to move to Mansfield may be that TIF was only offered by Mansfield at the time.

Other Key Policy Actions and Planning Initiatives

► Rezoned the Development Center (2005)

In 2004, the Town became concerned that the State would sell the 700-acre Wrentham Developmental Center to a developer. In 2005, Town Meeting voted to change the zoning from residential to a new district called Conservation, Recreation, Schools, and Parks (CRSP), in order to better control future use. Eighty acres of this parcel was previously purchased by the Town in 1990 and in 2008 became the Rice Complex, an expansive recreation and athletic complex.

► Studied Downtown Transportation Safety (2009)

Upon the request of the Town, members from the Central Transportation Planning Staff and MAPC studied the traffic and safety concerns in the Downtown and around the Wrentham Common. The report, Community Transportation Technical Assistance Program: Wrentham Common Traffic Safety (2009), includes short-term and long-term recommendations for the intersections of Route 1A and Common Street; Routes 1A and 140; Route 140 and Common Street; and Taunton Street, Common Street, and David Brown Way. The recommended interventions include relocating pedestrian crosswalks to be perpendicular to streets, constructing curb extensions, and providing a mid-block crossing on David Brown Way from one part of the Common to the other.

➤ **Adopted the Town Charter (2014)**

The Town adopted the first Town Charter, which provided significant improvements to municipal responsibilities, authorities, and organization.

➤ **Studied transportation safety on Route 1A (South Street) (2017)**

The Central Transportation Planning Staff directed by the Boston region Metropolitan Planning Organization studied Route 1A, as one of a series of studies of 25 corridors in the region. The study, Route 1A Corridor Study (2017), found a high crash rate along the corridor, especially around the Town Common and near the Premium Outlets. Recommendations included low-cost, short-term improvements such as converting on-street angle parking to parallel parking near the Common and replacing the Yield sign at Common Street and Route 140 to a Stop sign, as well as high-cost, long-term improvements such as redesigning and adding sidewalks from Randall Road to Creek Street.

➤ **Prepared a Hazard Mitigation Plan (2018)**

The 2018 Hazard Mitigation Plan identified flooding as the greatest hazard threatening Wrentham and that climate change may exacerbate the threat. The highest priority mitigation measures are to complete a feasibility study for renovating or moving the Department of Public Works; adopt a stormwater bylaw; implement the Open Space and Recreation Plan; and require new Low Impact Development strategies and stronger wetland protections.

➤ **Hosted a Community Resilience Building Workshop (2018)**

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program helps each community in the Commonwealth identify its climate resiliency vulnerabilities and strengths in terms of natural resources, infrastructure, and society. Wrentham's workshop identified inland flooding as the greatest climate hazard, consistent with the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Wrentham's strengths include a cooperative public safety staff; 2,700 acres of open space that retains, slows, and allows for the infiltration of flood water; and community services to serve residents in need. The top recommendations to strengthen the resilience of natural resources are to re-evaluate the stormwater bylaws, create an Open Space and Recreation plan, and restore the lake systems. The recommendations for infrastructure are to establish an emergency shelter, relocate the Public Works building outside of the floodplain, and improve communications equipment and strategies. Recommendations to strengthen social resiliency include creating a cohesive Local Emergency Planning Committee, creating a plan to protect Housing Authority residents, increasing the size of the Senior Center, expanding the food pantry, and creating a back-up supply of potable water.

Prepared an Open Space and Recreation Plan (2021)

- The Open Space and Recreation Plan is a 7-year plan for protection of Wrentham's natural resources and recreational opportunities. According to the plan, there are 4,671 acres of protected open space, recreation land, and private property with limited protection in Wrentham. The goals for the next 7 years are to protect watersheds to maintain water quality; preserve Wrentham's rural appearance; create support for open space protection; protect sensitive habitat and wildlife corridors, improvement of existing recreation facilities; and develop new facilities and programs to serve all demographic groups.



Wrentham's Vision

The Vision Statement provides a north star for the future of Wrentham. It is a statement of identity and aspirations developed through a public process, and it provides a framework for *Vision of Tomorrow: Wrentham's 2030 Master Plan*. The Goals and Strategies of the Master Plan, which will guide the Town's policy, programs, and investment decisions for the next 10 years, are aimed at making this vision a reality.

Vision Statement

Wrentham is a charming town, proud of its Downtown and open spaces and a great place to raise a family. Through a public process, we have set a vision for the future.

By 2030, we aspire to:

- ▶ ***Continue to cultivate a community-oriented and welcoming culture for all, regardless of race, religion, gender, or age***
- ▶ ***Protect more farmland and open space for cultural heritage, scenic beauty, habitat, and water quality***
- ▶ ***Become more walkable and bikeable with sidewalks and trails***
- ▶ ***Strengthen the Downtown with more small businesses, dining options, homes, and places to gather***
- ▶ ***Maintain the rural landscape by promoting sustainable land use patterns and shifting away from sprawl development***
- ▶ ***Encourage diversity with a mix of housing options affordable to young adults, families, households with lower-incomes, and seniors***
- ▶ ***Ensure fiscal responsibility while maintaining high-quality infrastructure and services***
- ▶ ***Support a healthy economy with a mix of businesses, good job opportunities, and a diverse tax base***
- ▶ ***Continue to be a great place to raise a family with strong schools and more community events***

To effectively pursue and strike a balance between these goals, we encourage transparent governance, strong civic engagement, and volunteerism.

Economic Development

The small businesses and commercial districts of Wrentham contribute to its identity and character, the job opportunities influence the quality of life of residents, and a healthy economy and housing market helps provide for the Town's strong schools. Thoughtful economic development strategies can help achieve the Vision for a vibrant Town Center, as well as a fiscally responsible Town government.

Quick Facts

► Workforce

- 60% have Bachelor's degree or higher
- Residents work in a variety of sectors, mostly in Boston and in other locations northeast of Wrentham

► Businesses & Employees

- Most jobs in Wrentham are in Retail and Education. About half of people working in retail in Wrentham are 30 years or older
- Job growth over past decade has been almost all in Retail
- About 1 in 3 jobs in Wrentham are at Clothing and clothing accessories stores
- 50% of businesses employ 4 or fewer employees
- 80% of taxes from residential property, 20% from commercial/industrial

► COVID-19 pandemic

- 10% of residents unemployed in September 2020, 1 in 5 of those who were unemployed were renters



Key Themes

The Economic Development Goals and Strategies are based on research, data analysis, best practices, and community engagement, as presented in the existing conditions assessment. This assessment provides new insight into the economic health of residents and businesses, as well as the fiscal health of the Town and provides a valuable resource for the community when implementing the plan and meeting new challenges and opportunities. The key themes of the assessment are summarized below.

- ▶ **The pandemic has had devastating impacts. Wrentham's businesses and jobs are concentrated in the retail sector, which has been one of the hardest hit industries both in terms of jobs and sales.** As of September 2020, 10% of Wrentham residents were unemployed. In addition to the immediate impacts, the future of brick-and-mortar retail is uncertain as more people started buying more goods online during the pandemic in order to maintain physical distance.
- ▶ **There are more jobs than workers in Wrentham, yet there's a mismatch between the local workforce and the local jobs.** Almost all residents commute out of Town and work in higher-paying jobs in Boston or other destinations northeast of Wrentham. Half of residents spend more than an hour commuting each day, and 20% of residents spend more than two hours commuting each day. In contrast, people who are employed in Wrentham come from locations south and southwest of Wrentham and mostly work in lower-paying retail jobs.
- ▶ **There are five main commercial districts: Downtown, Route 1, Wampum Corner, Premium Outlets, and western portion of Route 140, each with distinct characteristics that serve different clientele. However, businesses and jobs are concentrated at the Outlets.** Forty percent of Wrentham's jobs and 25% of its businesses are located at the Outlets. Regardless, about half of businesses in Wrentham are small businesses employing four or fewer employees.
- ▶ **Recent rezoning in Downtown Wrentham and along Route 1 provide unique opportunities for new commercial development. However, there are also unique challenges in both areas.** For example, the recent rezoning along Route 1 provides opportunity for new office and retail development, as well as protection and enhancement of natural and recreational resources in the area. However, there is strong competition in the retail sector in nearby locations in Foxborough, Plainville, and Franklin, where many residents leave Wrentham to go shopping for groceries, clothes, and home supplies. In addition, uncertainty in the development process and Wrentham's historical reputation as being unfriendly to business has muted growth.
- ▶ **Wrentham has the lowest residential tax rate and the second to lowest commercial and industrial tax rates out of all neighboring towns. The Outlets account for almost 10% of Wrentham's property tax revenue.** The next largest taxpayer accounts for less than 1% of the property tax base, demonstrating that the Outlets have an enormous role in the fiscal health of Wrentham.

Goals and Strategies

Economic Development Goal #1:

Pursue strategic and innovative strategies for new economic opportunities in Wrentham, including leveraging Wrentham's major attractions such as the Premium Outlets, Rice Complex, and natural, agricultural, and historical resources.

Background

Wrentham's unique assets and proud rural heritage provide opportunity for new economic growth, which is particularly important given the pandemic's devastating economic impacts. Wrentham's businesses and jobs are concentrated in the retail sector, which has been one of the hardest hit industries both in terms of jobs and sales. Thoughtful strategies are needed to support a strong recovery.

Strategies:

1. **Work with Foxborough and Plainville to market the area as a multi-day destination with unique attractions to implement the [Foxborough, Wrentham, & Plainville Regional Destination Marketing Plan](#).** The first recommended actions are to: create a visitor-friendly website for the region, conduct community outreach to build content for the website, and develop funding sources to support tourism marketing efforts.
 - Background: According to the US Travel Association, visitors to Wrentham spent over \$248 million in 2018.¹ The "Regional Destination Marketing Plan" aims to convert these one-day visitors to multi-day visitors that enjoy the major attractions of the local area, including the Premium Outlets, Plainridge Park Casino, and Gillette Stadium and Patriot Place. The Marketing Plan focuses on the following five target audiences: Domestic Leisure Visitor Market, International Leisure Visitor Market, Group Tour Market, Meetings & Events, Local Community with five phases of coordinated communication strategies.
2. **Encourage visitors already in Wrentham to better support local businesses.** Work with the Rice Complex and the Wrentham Premium Outlets on marketing local restaurants, shops, and historic sites to visitors with on-site kiosks, brochures, or other means, and installing attractive signage, branding, and wayfinding at major attractions identifying Wrentham and directing visitors to Downtown Wrentham and historic sites.
3. **Create opportunities for local businesses at the Rice Complex, Premium Outlets, and Sweatt Beach.** On-site farmers markets, food trucks, craft markets, or other temporary, pop-up uses could create low-barrier opportunities for entrepreneurs as well as new markets for established enterprises.
4. **Pursue a walking/biking trail on the existing railroad bed connecting Downtown and Premium Outlets, with respect and sensitivity to adjacent landowners.** The rail trail could be part of the larger [Metacomet Greenway](#) project, helping to encourage healthy activities, access to green space, and a potential decrease in traffic congestion as more people safely ride their bikes to destinations.

¹ Foxborough, Wrentham, & Plainville Regional Destination Marketing Plan. August 13, 2020. <<https://www.wrentham.ma.us/files/Wrentham%20Website%20Files/Economic%20Development%20Commission/Regional%20Destinaton%20Marketing%20Plan%202020%20FINAL.pdf>>

5. **Work with local farmers to strengthen agrotourism, such as apple picking events, farmers markets, farm tours, informational website and social media, and branding and marketing.**
6. **Promote the water-related recreational activities including boating, fishing, and swimming at Sweatt Beach and Lake Pearl.**
7. **Provide walking tours and educational events for residents and visitors on Wrentham's history in partnership with the Wrentham schools, the Historical Commission, the Cultural Council, and the Economic Development Commission.** Innovative options, such as providing QR codes at historical markers with further information about Wrentham's history, could help encourage greater engagement.
8. **Expand business opportunities by pursuing Wrentham as a wedding destination.**
 - ▶ Background: Downtown Wrentham has a unique opportunity to serve as a wedding destination with the Town Common, Sweatt Park, and Proctor Mansion all within walking distance of three churches. In addition, Lake Pearl Wrentham, which hosts weddings and other events, is nearby. Greater coordination, planning, and promotion could create new business opportunities and vibrancy Downtown while thoughtfully mitigating impacts on local neighborhoods.

Economic Development Goal #2: Provide support for and improve coordination and communication between Wrentham's businesses and the Town.

Background

Although most jobs are at the Outlets, about half of all businesses in Wrentham are small businesses that employ fewer than 5 employees. Residents want to support their local businesses, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Greater communication between the Town and the business community could help strengthen the local business community.

Strategies:

1. **Build the Wrentham Business Collaborative by continuing to invite local businesses, including farmers, to participate and support ongoing communication and collaboration.**
2. **Lead on a coordinated marketing and branding campaign for Wrentham and its businesses and promote the Wrentham brand at local events and in wayfinding improvements.**
 - ▶ Background: When asked "How can the Town help support economic recovery?" on a Master Plan survey conducted in April 2021, more than half of the 20 respondents chose "Marketing and branding."
3. **Support economic recovery through technical assistance.** Assistance can include help applying for federal and State grants and loans, enhancing opportunities to expand take-out and delivery options, building online and social media presence, and other increasingly important strategies for post-COVID commercial success.

Economic Development Goal #3: Make Wrentham more business-friendly and attract context-appropriate development that diversifies employment options and the tax base and adds value to the community.

Background

There are few high-paying jobs in Town, resulting in the vast majority of Wrentham residents, who are largely well-educated and higher-income, having long commutes to work: 51% of residents spend more than an hour commuting each day and 21% spend more than 2 hours commuting each day. In addition, the lack of diverse bigger businesses means that a substantial portion of the Town budget is dependent on the success of the Outlets.

Strategies:

1. **Leverage recent Route 1 rezoning and build off of the [Regional Destination Marketing Plan](#) by initiating a proactive business recruitment strategy.** The strategy should focus on higher-paying jobs, such as the life sciences and biopharmaceutical industries. Tasks include initiating discussion with property owners, creating a preliminary market analysis, researching the businesses that employ the most Wrentham residents, and reaching out to potential employers and commercial uses to locate along the Route 1 corridor in Wrentham.
2. **Undertake a comprehensive zoning audit and recodification to clarify and update allowable commercial, office, and industrial uses to reduce the uncertainty and delay of the development process.**
3. **Review and update zoning and other regulations to support targeted uses, including artisan and other small businesses; home businesses, remote work options, and shared office spaces; and dance, music, and cultural centers.**
4. **Review Town fee structure and consolidate fees to simplify the fee structure and increase predictability.**
5. **Review and update Town bylaws regulating liquor licensing, including temporary and outdoor, to better support small businesses and outdoor dining options, where appropriate.**
6. **Review and update Town bylaws regulating noise to allow outdoor music Downtown, when appropriate.**
7. **Partner with other communities and participate in the Greater Boston Region Workforce Planning Blueprint process to support a workforce pipeline.**
8. **Pursue a strategic planning process to diversify tax base.**

Economic Development Goal #4: Invest in the Downtown to support a walkable, attractive Town Center.

Background

The Town Center is the heart of the community, and new investment and improvements could make it shine with safer crosswalks, coordinated marketing, and development of vacant sites. To dovetail this Master Plan, the Town has received a State grant to develop a Local Rapid Recovery Plan to support a strong recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in the Town Center. Many dedicated residents of Wrentham have already invested time and resources to coordinate landscaping, holiday decorations, and community events Downtown.

Strategies:

Small Businesses

1. **Continue development of and implement the Local Rapid Recovery Plan.**
2. **Encourage more local dining establishments by reaching out to pop-up dining establishments to locate permanently in Wrentham and to popular restaurants in the area to open a second location.**

Management, programming, and maintenance

3. **Assess potential for and pursue, if appropriate, a Downtown Business Association or Business Improvement District to serve as a district management entity and help fund improvements such as trash and recycling cans, wayfinding, and/or landscaping in the Downtown.**
4. **Continue to cultivate the Town Center as a community gathering place by hosting safe and healthy community and arts and culture events in the Town Common and Sweatt Park.**

▶ Background: The Wrentham Volunteer Alliance was formed in November 2020 from several different organizations and clubs to work collaboratively and efficiently for the betterment of the Town. The Alliance is working on a schedule of events for 2021-2022 to bring culture and arts to the Downtown and Sweatt Park, in partnership with the Wrentham Business Collaborative.

5. **Plan for ways to encourage use of and better integrate Sweatt Park into the Downtown.**
6. **Seek strategies for providing and maintaining trash and recycling cans Downtown through public/private partnerships.**

Pedestrian and transportation improvements

7. **Initiate an inclusive planning process and seek federal and State funding to implement the short-and long-term recommendations for improved pedestrian safety and reduced traffic impacts from the 2017 Route 1A Corridor Study.** Improvements at the intersection of Route 1A and Route 140 include maintaining crosswalk pavement markings and redesigning Common Street and David Brown Way.

8. **Improve pedestrian safety between businesses on South Street and the Town Common to encourage its use.**
9. **In partnership with the Wrentham Disability Commission, install sidewalks Downtown compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to improve safety and convenience for all Wrentham residents and visitors, particularly seniors.**
10. **Install sidewalks on Creek Street to provide a 3-mile walking circuit from the Town Common, past the High School, and around Lake Archer.** Developing the rail trail per Economic Development Goal #1, Strategy #4 will also provide a walking trail connected to Downtown.

Vacant and underutilized sites

11. **Identify the barriers to private-sector investment in and development of the vacant Tyco site through discussion with property owners and other stakeholders.** Examine frontage and access, infrastructure, tax incentives, zoning updates, and other strategies to encourage development that supports the goals of this plan, including greater housing options, a walkable and attractive Downtown, and space for small businesses. *(See Housing Goal #1)*
12. **Analyze the costs and benefits of wastewater treatment options for new development in the Town Center and pursue the most beneficial option.** Options include municipal sewer, utilizing the High School's package treatment plan, and requiring a new package treatment plant. Identify federal and State funding opportunities for supporting new infrastructure. *(See Housing Goal #1)*
13. **Reach out to the property owner of the vacant Tyco site to pursue temporary uses of the site, including community events, small markets, outdoor eating, etc.**
14. **Landscape and pave the Town's gravel parking lot on the corner of Dedham and Franklin Streets.**



Source: Diane Glass



Housing

Everyone needs a home. Housing is foundational to the community, and having good housing options for residents of all stages in life--from young professionals to busy families to seniors looking to downsize--helps promote stability in the lives of residents and the community at large. In addition, housing strategies can help direct growth to existing neighborhood centers and reduce the pressure to develop farmland and open space.

Quick Facts

► Households

- 4,162 households, 35% have children
- 2.75 people per household
- \$113,000 median income
- \$137,768 median income of homeowners
- \$40,260 median income of renters

► Housing stock

- 4,240 housing units
- 86% are single-family, 14% multifamily
- 83% owner-occupied, 17% renter-occupied
- \$490,000 median cost of buying a single-family home, with large year-to-year variations
- \$2,200 monthly median cost of renting a home
- 485 units on the Subsidized Housing Inventory

► Municipal tools

- Wrentham Housing Authority
- Community Preservation Act
- Housing Choice Community designation
- Recent zoning updates: Village Center District and Accessory Dwelling unit bylaw

Key Themes

Like the Economic Development Goals and Strategies, the Housing Goals and Strategies are based on insights gleaned from the existing conditions assessment. Some of the findings, such as the need for greater housing options for seniors looking to downsize are well-known, whereas others, like the number of residents struggling with housing costs, has come as a surprise to some. This assessment provides a valuable resource for the community when implementing the plan and meeting new challenges and opportunities. The key themes of the assessment are summarized below.

- ▶ **The cost of buying a home in Wrentham is increasingly out of reach for the middle class, including Wrentham teachers and Town staff. People who live here have long commutes to their distant, high-paying jobs.** The median income of a Wrentham resident is \$113,000 allowing them to relatively easily afford housing in town. However, most jobs in Wrentham are in retail, which is one the lowest-paying industries, and the cost of buying a home is even out of reach for our teachers and Town staff. For example, someone making the average Wrentham teacher salary would likely not be able to afford the average single-family home in town.
- ▶ **Almost 1 in 5 Wrentham households rent their home, and they are struggling with the costs.** Most residents who rent are already cost-burdened by housing, meaning they spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing, and the cost of rent has almost doubled in the past few years. Most of the jobs in Wrentham don't pay enough for employees to be able to rent in town. In addition, the disparity between the incomes of homeowners and renters in Wrentham is substantially greater than in other towns.
- ▶ **While Wrentham's median income is relatively high, Wrentham's middle class is shrinking. There is a large portion of low-income residents—almost 30% of households living in Wrentham qualify for Affordable Housing.** Wrentham's middle class has been shrinking for the past 10 years. Currently, Wrentham has the smallest percentage of middle-income residents (defined here as making \$75,000-\$150,000) out of all neighboring towns.
- ▶ **There is a shortage of smaller homes to meet the changing demographics, and residents are frustrated with the high cost of new housing.** Households have been and are projected to get smaller—the population is aging and more seniors live alone or with a partner, couples are getting married or partnered later in life, and families are having fewer children. This results in greater demand for housing as more homes will be needed to shelter the same number of people, as well as a growing demand for homes with fewer bedrooms. Yet, many of the smaller homes built a few decades ago in Wrentham's beloved neighborhoods, including along the lakes as well as along East Street, Taunton Street, and Thurston Street, would be illegal to build under current zoning. In these areas, current zoning requires new houses to be built of at least 30,000 square feet or 3/4 of an acre, and dozens of lots are less than 22,00 square feet or 1/2 acre.
- ▶ **Recent Downtown rezoning provides opportunity for new housing, but no new development has been proposed.** In 2018, Wrentham adopted the Village Center District at Town Meeting to encourage a more attractive and walkable downtown. When the zoning was adopted, it was estimated that it could create the potential for approximately 230 new housing units.

Goals and Strategies

Housing Goal #1:

Guide development towards the Town Center and areas with existing infrastructure.

Background

In 2018, Wrentham residents adopted a new zoning bylaw for the Town Center aimed at promoting a more attractive and walkable Downtown. The new zoning encourages the development of the vacant Crosby Valve/Tyco site to expand the historic Downtown with new housing, shops, restaurants, and more. Throughout the Master Plan planning process, community members have supported new growth in the Downtown. However, due to a variety of circumstances, no new development has been proposed. Identifying and addressing the barriers will help strengthen the Downtown.

Strategies:

1. **Identify the circumstances that need to be addressed to prompt private-sector investment in and development of the vacant Tyco site through discussion with property owners and other stakeholders.** Examine frontage and access, infrastructure, tax incentives, zoning updates, and other issues and strategies to encourage development that supports the goals of this plan, including greater housing options, a walkable and attractive Downtown, and space for small businesses. *(See Economic Development Goal #4)*
2. **Analyze the costs and benefits of wastewater treatment options for new development in the Downtown and pursue the most beneficial option.** Identify federal and State funding opportunities for supporting new infrastructure. *(See Economic Development Goal #4)*
3. **Initiate an inclusive public planning process to update zoning for small, multifamily housing Downtown.**

► Background: Throughout the Master Plan process, the Village Center has been identified as a high priority for new housing. Townhouses and small multifamily dwellings are one part of the vision for development of the vacant Tyco site as outlined by the Downtown Village Center Zoning. However, there are inconsistencies and omissions in the Wrentham Zoning Bylaw that regulates small multifamily homes. For example, there are no standards for homes one above the other—the only standards regulating multifamily homes are for Rowhouses, which are not defined. Clarifying the zoning standards for small multifamily housing will help provide guidance to developers and certainty that the development meets the community's vision.

In addition, to help address the housing crisis, the State has recently passed legislation encouraging municipalities to allow multifamily housing in targeted areas (Massachusetts General Law Section 3A of Chapter 40A). Specifically, the new law requires municipalities to amend their multifamily zoning to allow 15 units per acre by right in walkable areas with traditional neighborhood design or near transit options, in order to be eligible for important funding opportunities, including MassWorks and Housing Choice Capital Grants.

One potential strategy for Wrentham to clarify its multifamily zoning standards and to meet the State's requirements is to amend the Village Center zoning as a Smart Growth Zoning Overlay (per Chapter 40R). This approach would have the added benefit of allowing the Town to gain reimbursements from the Commonwealth to cover the costs of educating any school-age children who move into new housing in the zoning district (per Chapter 40s). To provide guidance to developers and to meet the State's new requirements, the Village Center zoning will require amendments.

4. **Proactively communicate with the Commonwealth to monitor changes and research potential uses of the Wrentham Developmental Center (WDC).**

- Background: The Wrentham Developmental Center is over 600 acres of land, buildings, and supporting infrastructure owned and operated by the Commonwealth. Given its large size and existing infrastructure, the area could provide opportunities for the Town. By staying engaged with the Commonwealth, Wrentham can learn about and be prepared to shape potential opportunities. This strategy also relates to the Economic Development Goals. For more background on the history of the Wrentham Developmental Center, please see "Progress Since the 2004 Master Plan" in the Introduction Chapter of this Master Plan.

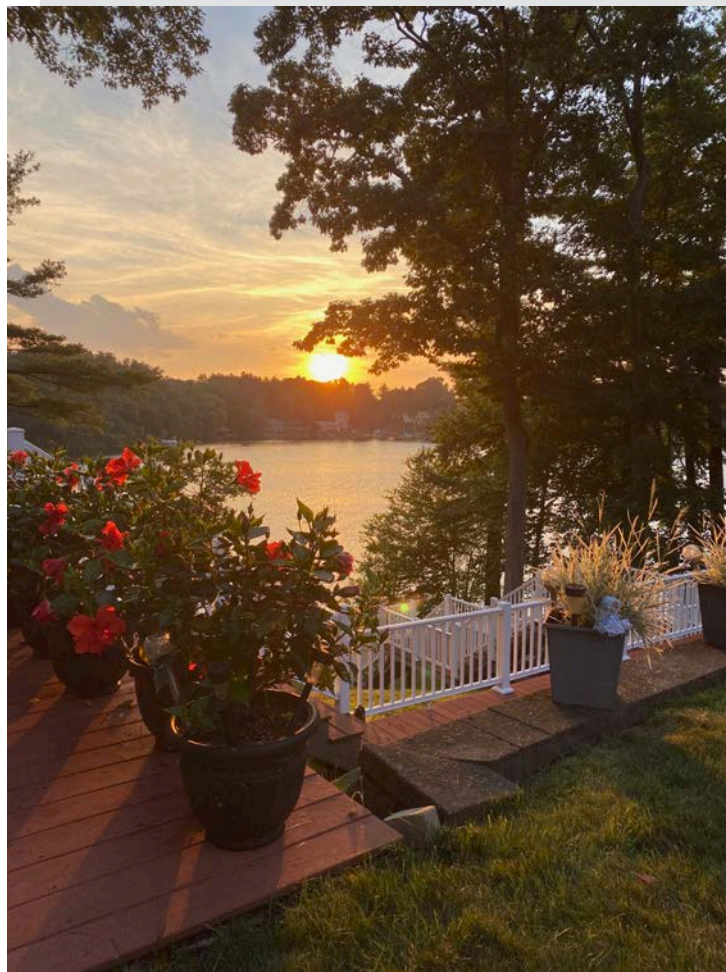


Photo Credit: Diane Glass

Housing Goal #2:

Protect open space, with a focus on protecting land with valuable natural resources, and discourage development of forests and fields.

Background

Wrentham has a lovely, rural landscape and a strong agricultural heritage. As Wrentham works to better meet the need for housing choices, it can guide development in different ways. Some land use patterns require a lot of land per home or can negatively impact resources, while others have a smaller footprint on the land and can actually include protection of natural resources. All new developments should be located and designed with deference to natural and cultural resources. Wrentham residents very strongly support protection of open space.

Strategies

1. **Update the Open Space Preservation Development bylaw to encourage open space protection in new subdivision developments, with a focus on protecting land with valuable natural resources.**

► Background: The Open Space Preservation Bylaw offers the potential for an effective way to protect open space. The bylaw allows developers to cluster the housing in a subdivision if they permanently protect a certain percentage of the open space. This approach helps encourage housing options, protects open space, and supports more sustainable land use patterns. See page A-58 for more information.

However, during the Master Plan process, community members expressed distrust about the use of the bylaw. In particular, there is concern that the bylaw does not help to protect valuable open space. Amendments to the bylaw can target these concerns by requiring assessment and consideration of the natural, cultural, and scenic resources of the proposed open space to be conserved. In addition, amendments can ensure protected open space meets the needs of the community in other ways. For example, amendments can ensure that unbuildable land does not count towards the open space requirements, developers are incentivized to make the protected open space publicly accessible with walking trails, and/or that protection of land critical to water supply is prioritized. In this way, Open Space Preservation Developments can more effectively serve the community.

2. **Proactively implement the recent Open Space and Recreation Plan to strategically conserve open space, especially working farms and areas with high visibility.**

► Background: Wrentham's 2020 Open Space and Recreation Plan establishes a set of goals and strategies for land conservation and recreation improvements. Aggressive implementation of the plan, including establishing preservation alternatives for farmers, protecting land in perpetuity, and enforcing the Scenic Roads Bylaw is one of the most direct ways to protect Wrentham's rural character.

3. **Research and pursue a zoning amendment to discourage or prohibit clear cutting of trees.**

► Background: Tree protection bylaws are increasingly popular in the metro Boston area. Bylaw amendments can require the identification and protection of significant trees as part of the subdivision process, as well as limit land disturbance and clear cutting of native species. Tyngsborough, Dennis, and Harwich provide zoning examples.

Housing Goal #3:

Encourage a greater variety of housing options in order to better serve residents and the people who work in Wrentham and to allow greater access to the educational, cultural, and community opportunities in Wrentham.

Background

It's hard for young adults, first-time homebuyers, one parent families, seniors looking to downsize, and other smaller households to find a home in Wrentham. There are several reasons why the private market is not better meeting the demand for smaller homes, some of which the Town can influence and others it cannot. There is opportunity for Wrentham's zoning, which regulates land use and development, to make it easier for developers to build a range of housing options, including homes of more modest size and cost.

Every change to Wrentham's zoning must be approved at Town Meeting, under State law. Proposed zoning amendments should include an inclusive public process, including clear communication between the Town staff, elected representatives, and the public; a data-informed assessment of the zoning options and potential benefits and negative impacts, including on natural resources; and proactive outreach to people often underrepresented in planning processes, such as renters, low-income residents, and people of color.

Strategies:

1. Establish a Wrentham Housing Committee.

- Background: Wrentham has an active volunteer community with residents serving on committees and dedicating significant time to the future of the Town, however, there is no group dedicated to Wrentham's housing issues and opportunities. A volunteer Housing Committee could help support community engagement, implement the Strategies of this Master Plan, and pursue additional opportunities to achieve the Goals of this Master Plan as they arise.

2. Initiate an inclusive planning process to update Article 13 in the Wrentham Zoning Bylaw to allow well-designed "Cottage Clusters" that are not age-restricted.

- Background: A cottage cluster is a group of smaller, single-family homes oriented towards a shared green space. Cottage clusters are thoughtfully designed to encourage a community feel, often with parking located in the rear of homes. Wrentham currently allows cottage cluster housing for seniors by Special Permit. The Community at Pond Meadow is similar to a cottage cluster given the small grouping of modestly sized homes around green space. Examples of other cottage clusters exist in Concord, Dennis, and Norfolk. Survey results from the Master Plan process show strong support for well-designed cottage clusters.



3. Initiate an inclusive planning process to consider potential amendments to the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) bylaw to allow greater use of these housing types.

- Background: An accessory dwelling unit (also known as an ADU, granny flat, or in-law unit) is a smaller home on the same lot as a primary, single-family home. They provide a simple and low-impact method of increasing housing options for seniors looking to downsize, young adults, and other smaller households, with little impact on the surrounding neighborhood. Wrentham recently amended its zoning bylaw to allow accessory dwelling units by Special Permit.

Currently, Wrentham only allows accessory dwelling units that are attached to the primary home and occupied by a family member of the resident of the primary home. Specifically, the requirement that the resident be a family member of the resident of the primary home creates difficult enforcement issues. Other municipalities in the metro Boston area are considering amendments, and several towns including Littleton and Milford allow non-family members to reside in an ADU. The Wrentham bylaw has already been met with interest from several homeowners to build new accessory dwellings.

Amendments to the existing bylaw, including allowing ADUs by right, to allow non-family members to reside in an ADU, or to allow detached ADUs, could make it easier to build accessory dwellings and allow these housing options to serve more of the community. Concerns about short-term rentals such as Airbnb rentals or owner-occupancy could be directly addressed within the bylaw, as is common in many other towns and cities. Initial survey results from the Master Plan process show interest in learning more about potential amendments, with the most support for allowing detached ADUs.

4. Research and pursue potential zoning amendments or other initiatives to limit tear downs.

- Background: Based on community engagement, residents are concerned about the loss of Wrentham's smaller homes, as they are being torn down and replaced with large houses. Research into best practices and discussion with other municipalities may provide potential strategies to address this issue. Careful consideration must be given to allow for tear downs and renovations that are necessary for safety and maintenance.

5. Clarify the existing definitions and update the zoning standards for two-family homes.

- Background: Establishing clear standards for well-designed two-family homes will help meet the need for more housing options, especially options of more modest size and cost. For example, two-family homes allow for intergenerational families to live near each other with younger family members living next to or above the senior relatives, as well as options for senior residents to collect income from an additional unit. However, there are currently no standards in Wrentham Zoning Bylaw for two-family homes where one home is above the other. This allows for confusion, inefficiency, and the potential for new development that does not meet the community's vision.

6. **Adopt Design Guidelines to ensure high quality development consistent with neighborhood context and to reduce uncertainty and time costs in the residential development review process.**
 - Background: Design Guidelines provide guidance on and illustrations of preferred architectural and site design features of a building, including materials, rooflines, orientation towards the street, and more. As Guidelines, they are not required standards but help reduce inefficiency in the permit review process by clearly communicating aesthetic preferences to all developers rather than through each individual review process. Several other municipalities in the region have Design Guidelines that could serve as examples.
7. **Research and pursue potential strategies for encouraging net zero residential buildings to lower energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, including density bonuses or other means.**
 - Background: A net zero home or community of homes reduces energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions by producing enough renewable energy to meet its own annual energy consumption. There are several strategies for encouraging net zero buildings, including adopting the net zero stretch energy code locally. Some strategies can both help encourage net zero buildings and achieve the goal of more housing options, such as providing developers a density bonus for building homes that are net zero. For more information, see [MAPC's Municipal Net Zero Playbook](#).
8. **A large portion of current Wrentham residents are eligible for deed-restricted Affordable Housing based on their income. Encourage market-rate housing options that are within the means of these residents.**
 - Background: While Wrentham's median income is relatively high, there is a large portion of low-income residents—almost 30% of households in Wrentham qualify for Affordable Housing. Eligibility for Affordable Housing is based on household income and size. For example, a family of two earning \$77,000 or a family of four earning \$96,250 is considered eligible for Affordable Housing in Wrentham. In contrast, approximately 300 housing units or 7% of Wrentham's housing stock is Affordable Housing exclusive for low- to moderate-income households. Given the concern among many residents about building more deed-restricted Affordable Housing in Wrentham, the Town can aim to encourage more modest, market-rate housing within the means of these lower-income households. Several of the strategies above will help address the need, and new strategies may arise over the course of the Master Plan implementation.

Housing Goal #4:

Thoughtfully promote deed-restricted Affordable Housing in order to stay above the Commonwealth's regulated threshold of 10% to retain local control over development.

Background

Affordable Housing is for the exclusive use of households below a certain income level. "Deed-restricted" refers to the legal requirement restricting the home only to households that qualify based on their income. "Low income" is defined by the federal government. In Wrentham, a family of four earning \$96,000 or a family of two earning \$77,000 is considered "low income."

Affordable Housing can come in all shapes and sizes, and the homes can be rented or owned by the residents. The Affordable Housing in Wrentham includes 38 single-family homes in Eagle Brook Village, 25 apartments in Eagle Brook Village, 55 apartments at The Point, almost 150 homes owned and managed by the Housing Authority, and a couple of other smaller developments.

To help meet the local and regional need for Affordable Housing, the Commonwealth encourages cities and towns to maintain at least 10% of the total housing stock on the Commonwealth's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). The SHI includes deed-restricted Affordable Housing exclusively for lower income households to rent or own, as well as market-rate rental housing units built in mixed-income developments. In Wrentham, the SHI includes the approximately 300 deed-restricted Affordable Homes listed above, as well as an additional approximately 350 market-rate apartments in Eagle Brook and The Point. Based on this, Wrentham meets the State's 10% SHI threshold. Note that the release of the 2020 Census data may change where the Town stands in relationship to the 10% threshold.

If Wrentham does not continue to build Affordable Housing at the same pace as market-rate housing and it falls below the 10% threshold, developers are legally allowed to build Affordable Housing and mixed-income projects that do not fully comply with local zoning (MA General Law Chapter 40B). In other words, if Wrentham does not maintain a certain amount of Affordable Housing, developers can build projects that may be inconsistent with local planning efforts.

However, Wrentham has a choice. If the Town adjusts its regulations and works with developers to steadily build Affordable Housing, then it can stay above the 10% threshold and continue to have regulatory control and review over the design and location of the Affordable Housing. In doing so, the Town can help guide the shape, size, and location of Affordable Housing to be more aligned with the community vision. In addition, the Town can proactively serve its current and future lower income residents, including workers, seniors, and families, who are burdened by high housing costs.

Strategies

1. Prepare a Housing Production Plan to analyze and plan for appropriate Affordable Housing.

- Background: Wrentham's last Housing Production Plan was adopted immediately after the previous Master Plan planning process in 2005. Housing Production Plans provide a focused look at and recommendations to meet the Town's housing needs. The planning process would also provide opportunity for more community engagement and education about the housing issues and opportunities in Wrentham.

2. **Provide clear information about the existing Affordable Housing in Wrentham including cost, the need for Affordable Housing based on income limits, and the Town's potential options for meeting the need.**
 - Background: Residents of Affordable Housing come from all walks of life—as one resident of Affordable Housing in Wrentham explained: “I manage a bank in Wrentham, everyone knows who I am.” Unfortunately, during the Master Plan process, a handful of responses to the town-wide survey revealed a prejudice against families and households with low-incomes. Greater education and public discourse could help dispel misinformation and stereotypes, while raising awareness for the widespread need for more Affordable Housing. For example, during an interview as part of the planning process, a resident of Affordable Housing explained: “Before moving to Affordable Housing myself, I didn’t even know it existed.” A first step in improving communication is to clearly post the total number of Affordable Housing units in Wrentham, the income eligibility, and the cost of each unit.
3. **Inventory and track market rate and Affordable Housing development and existing stock in order to maintain at least 10% of housing units on the Subsidized Housing Inventory.**
 - Background: Monitoring development allows the Town to plan ahead and stay above the 10% threshold. In addition to new units, tracking the deed-restrictions of existing Affordable Housing units will help ensure that existing stock is preserved.
4. **Launch an inclusive planning process to develop effective inclusionary zoning to require or encourage a portion of housing units in certain new developments to be reserved as Affordable Housing for low-income households.**
 - Background: More than 100 cities and towns in the Commonwealth have inclusionary zoning, including Bellingham, Medway, Norfolk, and Mansfield. Inclusionary zoning bylaws can be designed to best serve the local community’s needs. For example, Bellingham requires that 10% of homes in developments of at least 8 homes be Affordable, where as Norfolk requires that 10% of homes in developments of at least 10 homes be Affordable. For more information, see the [Massachusetts Smart Growth Toolkit](#).
5. **Retain regulatory control of housing developments by working with private, public, or non-profit developers to build Affordable Housing consistent with Wrentham’s zoning.**
 - Background: Rather than falling below the 10% threshold and reacting to Affordable Housing proposals that are not necessarily consistent with Wrentham’s zoning, the Town can work with willing developers to stay above the 10% threshold and build Affordable Housing consistent with the local regulations. To encourage this proactive, local approach, the Commonwealth provides technical assistance through the Local Initiative Program (LIP) to communities and developers who are working together to create Affordable Housing opportunities. Wrentham can utilize the LIP to partner with mixed-income or Affordable Housing developers and receive technical assistance.

6. Review and pursue the potential for an Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

- Background: Dozens of municipalities across the Commonwealth have adopted Housing Trust Funds to create a designated source of funds for Affordable Housing. In most communities with housing trusts, CPA funds are the primary source of funds, therefore there are no new fees or taxes.

Wrentham adopted the CPA, levying a local tax for the exclusive uses of historic preservation, open space conservation, recreation, and Affordable Housing (also known as “community housing”). By law, at least 10% of CPA fund revenues must be used for Affordable Housing projects. To date, the use of Wrentham’s CPA funds for housing has been limited to installing a basketball hoop. The Town has the option to direct these revenues to a Trust Fund for strategic use on providing more housing options. For example, Norfolk has used its CPA funds to purchase property, provide short-term rental assistance, and purchase units to provide as Affordable Housing.

7. Support coordination between the Wrentham Housing Authority, the Planning Board, and the Community Preservation Committee (CPC).

- Background: Communication and collaboration will help foster greater understanding of the goals and challenges of Wrentham’s Boards, Committees, and staff, as well as promote more efficient use of limited resources to best meet Wrentham’s housing needs.

8. Review and pursue the potential for a Community Land Trust.

- Background: A Community Land Trust (CLT) is a private, non-profit corporation created to provide lasting affordability by retaining permanent ownership of the CLT land. CLT homeowners purchase only the building, not the land itself, reducing the barrier to entry for low- and moderate-income homebuyers.



Photo Credit: Warren Cook

Snapshot of Wrentham

Regional Context

Wrentham is located on the border of Massachusetts and Rhode Island approximately thirty miles southwest of Boston and thirty miles north of Providence, Rhode Island. It is in Norfolk County and bordered by the towns of Norfolk; Foxborough; Plainville; Cumberland, Rhode Island; Woonsocket, Rhode Island, Bellingham, and Franklin.

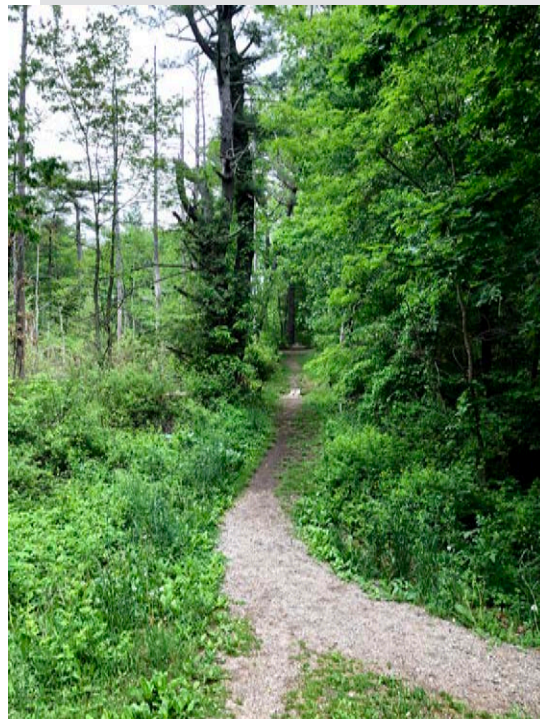
As part of the Boston metropolitan area, it is one of the 101 cities and towns represented by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). MAPC works with communities through eight sub-regional organizations whose members are appointed by chief elected officials and planning boards. Wrentham is a member of the Southwest Area Planning Committee (SWAP), along with Bellingham, Dover, Franklin, Hopkinton, Milford, Millis, Medway, Norfolk, and Sherborn.

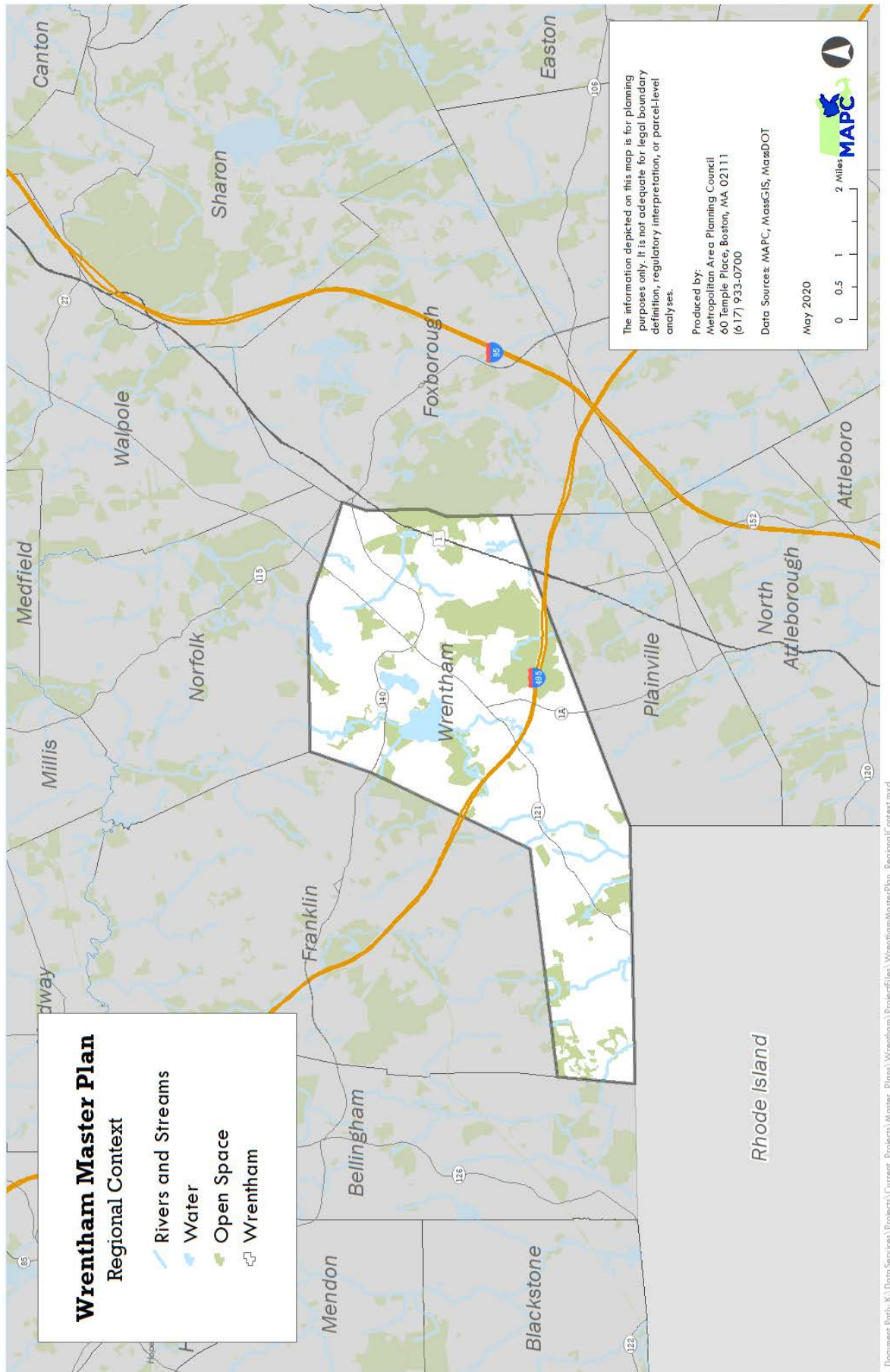
Two major highways provide easy automobile and truck access. Interstate 495, which forms a large half-circle around Boston and connects Cape Code with Interstate 90, runs east-west through Wrentham, and Interstate 95 connecting Boston and Providence, lies just east of Wrentham. The Wrentham Premium Outlets, located within the Town, as well as Gillette Stadium (home to the New England Patriots football team) located just northeast of Wrentham in Foxborough, draw people from across the region to shop and recreate.

In terms of natural resources, Wrentham includes the headwaters for four major rivers: the Charles, the Blackstone, the Ten Mile, and the Taunton Rivers, all of which are used for drinking water by adjacent and further downstream municipalities. Its own drinking water sources come almost entirely from within the Town boundaries. The Blue Hills, a small chain of hills, run from Wrentham to Milton.



Photo Credit: Warren Cook





History

Earliest History

Native Americans have lived in what is now known as Wrentham for over 8,000 years. In more recent times, the settlement was known as Wollomonopoag, meaning “place of shells”, referring to the resources of Lake Pearl and Lake Archer. The land was used as hunting, fishing, farming and village areas by the Wampanoag Indians. Oak Point, near Creek Street, was the site of the King Philip Oak, where the Native American leader, Metacomet, later known as King Philip, is said to have held council.

The first English settlers arrived to the area in the 1600's. Although early contact between the English settlers and Native Americans were friendly, increasing encroachment on Native land increased hostilities which erupted in the King Philip's War from 1675-1678. The war was devastating for both sides and marks the last armed resistance by the Native Americans in this area. Following the war, settlers rapidly rebuilt their holdings, expanding further into the area and displacing the Native Americans. By the late 1600's, a few dozen European settlers had portioned the lands and started to farm in the area.

The Town of Wrentham has its beginnings as an early outgrowth of Plymouth Colony, and quickly established its own identity and independence. It is named for Wrentham, England in County Suffolk on the North Sea and the birthplace of John Thurston, and other early settlers. Originally Wrentham extended from Dedham to the Rhode Island border. The area was connected to both Boston and Providence by the Post Road, the predecessor of Route 1. Its lands were originally part of Dedham, and became an incorporated town on October 17, 1673, after inhabitants petitioned the Dedham Selectmen who agreed to form the new town.

As settlement progressed, the Town Center and neighborhood areas became established. First for security, and then for business and convenience, each part of town began establishing unique identities. The Town Center grew up around the Common with church and civic buildings along with mercantile buildings forming the core of the town's identity. Containing the early crossroads and what became the post road between Boston and Providence, Wrentham rapidly became a fixture on the colonial scene.

Other neighborhoods, more clearly seen today in Wampum Corner and Sheldonville, emerged as local farming centers and had smaller scale commercial and civic components to serve their immediate needs. Over time, the central portions of these neighborhoods came to have more residences built along their main roads, cementing the community.

From its founding, Wrentham spawned nearly all of the Towns which now surround it, and the boundaries of Wrentham began to shrink as Towns formed from the incorporated area. Franklin and Foxborough were established in 1778 and Norfolk in 1870. The transformation was complete in 1905 when the Slacksville village of Wrentham became Plainville.

Ultimately the early focal points for the town of Wrentham became the Town Center, the lakes area of Lake Pearl and Lake Archer, Wampum Corner, Sheldonville, and the Post Road. The areas that nestled around these focal points were predominantly farmland or open space.

Recent Growth

From the first European settlements until the mid-twentieth century, Wrentham continued to be a lightly populated agricultural area. Suburbanization began following the Second World War. In the 1960's, Interstate 495 was constructed and has been a major driver of change. By facilitating access to employment centers, it stimulated a shift from agricultural land use to residential and commercial growth.

Beginning in the early 20th century, new development added important features to Wrentham's landscape. In 1910, when the population of Wrentham was only 1,700 people, the Wrentham State School, now known as the Wrentham Developmental Center, opened. The campus, just north of the town center, eventually grew to be over 700 acres, although by the 1980's, the patient population significantly downsized.

Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, Winter Brothers Tap and Die began operating on Kendrick Street in the Town Center. After the Second World War, the company was sold to the Crosby Valve and Gauge Company. The commercial and industrial use of this property, which included a rail line and rail operations on Depot Street, grew with additional businesses employing 700 people in buildings that covered almost 50 acres. It was the Town's largest employer and its biggest single tax revenue source until 1998. Crosby Valve was eventually sold to Tyco Flow, which in 2010, moved to Mansfield. Upon the sale, all of the buildings were leveled and removed.

In 1997, the Wrentham Premium Outlets opened at the southwest corner of Interstate 495 and State Route 1A. With retail space spreading over 600,000 square feet and operating with approximately 170 stores, it was the largest retail outlet mall in New England. Its total footprint with parking covers over 15 acres. Its retail space makes it the largest single source of tax revenue in Wrentham.

It was also during the late 1990's and early 2000's that two large residential neighborhoods in Wrentham were completed. Wrentham Village in the west end of town was the first of the two completed with approximately 95 homes. Wamponaug Estates nestled on the east side of Route 1A between Lake Pearl and Wampum Corner built out to nearly 100 homes. The two projects provide insight into the impacts of different land use patterns and approaches to housing development. Wrentham Village's 95 homes consumed 300-acres of farmland using conventional 2-acre lots. Using the Open Space Preservation Development (OSPD) Bylaw, Wamponaug Estate's nearly 100 homes were built on approximately 60 sand-covered acres of a former quarry and protected 56 acres of woodlands that serves to buffer to Lake Pearl and existing nearby homes from the development.

From 1970 to 2003 the Town conserved significant areas of land, adding to the conserved area of Trout Pond, a 42-acre parcel between Route 1A (South Street), Beach Street, and Taunton Street that was gifted to the Town in 1908. In 1970, the Town purchased 65 acres in the west end of Town that is known as Joe's Rock. In 1990, it added five more acres to this area. In 1985 the Town purchased 115 acres of an operating hayfield and meadow on the opposite side of West Street from Joe's Rock, now known as Birchwold Farm. In the early 2000s, the Town purchased 212 acres of woodland and wetlands that had been private property southwest of Lake Pearl. The land is now known as the Wollomonopoag Conservation Area, making a full historical circle back to the earliest origins of Wrentham.

Government Structure

Wrentham is governed by an Open Town Meeting form of government and is led by a Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator. The Board of Selectmen are the Chief Elected Officials and Executive Officers of Wrentham. The Board consists of five members who are elected for 3-year terms. According to Massachusetts General Laws, all municipal authority not delegated to other elected boards or retained by Town Meeting is vested with the Board of Selectmen. The Board appoints a Town Administrator for managing the day-to-day business of the Town within its policy direction and employs a Town Counsel for handling the Town's legal affairs.

Town Meeting represents Wrentham's legislative branch. The Town Charter requires Town meetings in June and November. In use for over 300 years, Open Town Meeting gives Massachusetts taxpayers a chance to voice their opinions and directly effect change in their communities. All voters are eligible to debate and vote on budgets, bylaws and all matters brought before Town Meetings, and approve bonding.

There are over 24 Town departments that manage the day-to-day operations of Wrentham.

Climate Change

With catastrophic wildfires in California, violent hurricanes in the southeast, and historical flooding across the Midwest, the impacts of climate change are being felt across the country. Massachusetts and Wrentham are not immune. As stated in the Community Resilience Building Summary of Findings, "Wrentham is currently challenged with localized flooding in roads, low drinking water supply during times of drought, water quality and stormwater management challenges, and widespread loss of electricity during severe storms."² Climate change is expected to contribute to increasingly threatening inland flooding, heat waves, severe storms, and drought in Wrentham. Without a dramatic decrease in global emissions, on the order of cutting emissions in half in the next 10 years, scientists expect more catastrophic impacts, including widespread drought, severe storms, and the concomitant economic disruptions and migrations.³

Coronavirus Pandemic

The pandemic has touched every person, every family, and all corners of our Town and country. Lives have been lost, children have stayed home from school, and family members went months without seeing each other in person. The economic disruptions have been devastating to some while having little effect on others.

For example, in Wrentham, as of September 2020, approximately 10% of the workforce was unemployed, however the impacts have not been distributed evenly across the population. Of the 505 unemployment claims in Wrentham, 20% were from renters, yet renters make up only 15% of the households in Wrentham. Therefore, renters in Wrentham were disproportionately harmed by the job losses during the pandemic. In addition, certain industries have been harder hit than others: approximately 25% of people who work in sales were laid off in the spring of 2020.⁴ With Wrentham's concentration of businesses and jobs at the Premium Outlets, it can be assumed that the pandemic has hit the local economy hard. Moreover, small businesses of all varieties have struggled through months of unprecedented challenge.

² Wrentham Community Resilience Building Summary of Findings, 2018.

³ International Panel on Climate Change, Summary for Policymakers, 2019. ⁴ UC Berkeley CoolClimate Network, [Average Annual Household Carbon Footprint](#) (2013)

⁴ MAPC, 2020. The COVID-19 Layoff Housing Map, October Update: The Crisis Continues.

One bright spot during the pandemic was the availability of socially-distanced recreation. The Joe’s Rock, Birchwold, Esker Trails, and Wollomonopoag Conservation Areas, among others, were widely used. The parking lots were typically full on weekends. The release of the Wrentham Guide to Open Spaces 2020, paid for by the Sweatt Fund, just prior to the onset of the pandemic helped steer many people to the outdoors and highlighted Wrentham’s open spaces, providing safe entertainment.

People

There are 11,734 residents in Wrentham. As shown in Figure Intro-1, between 1980 and 2000, the population increased by approximately 40%. In the past 20 years, the growth rate has slowed to 13%, and population growth is projected to continue to slow over the next 20 years. The projected population is 12,180 people in 2030 and 12,654 in 2040.⁵

The population is getting older, and projections indicate this trend will continue. The number of households with seniors is increasing, and conversely, the number of households with children is decreasing, as shown in Figure Intro-2. Similarly, the median age has increased from 40.9 to 43.2 in the eight years between 2007 and 2015. The number of seniors is expected to increase by approximately 1,000 people in the next 10 years, resulting in almost 30% of the Town’s population being over the age of 65 by 2030.⁶

Figure Intro-1: Population from 1980-2019 Wrentham

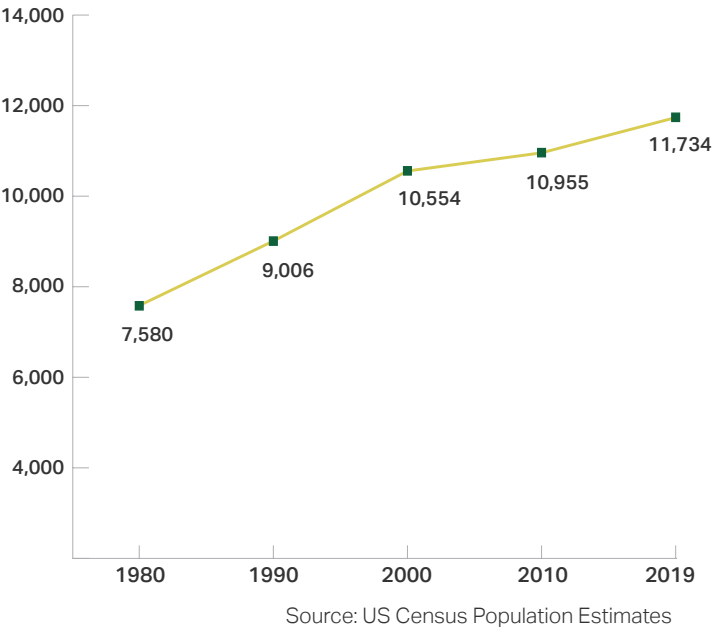
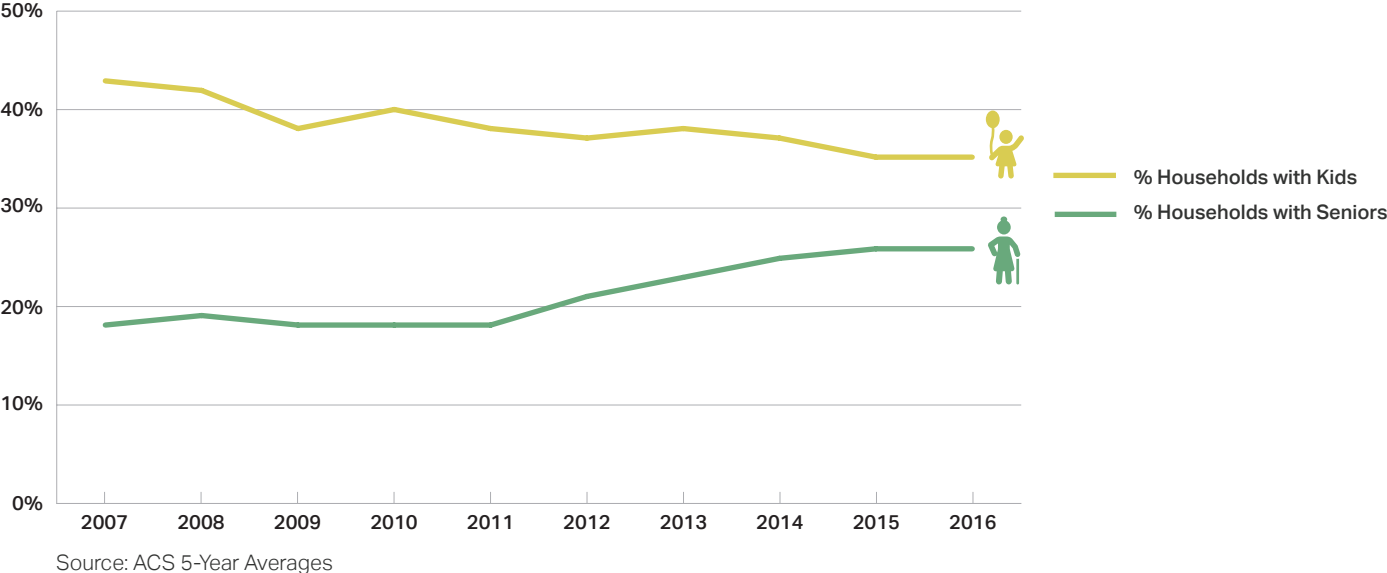


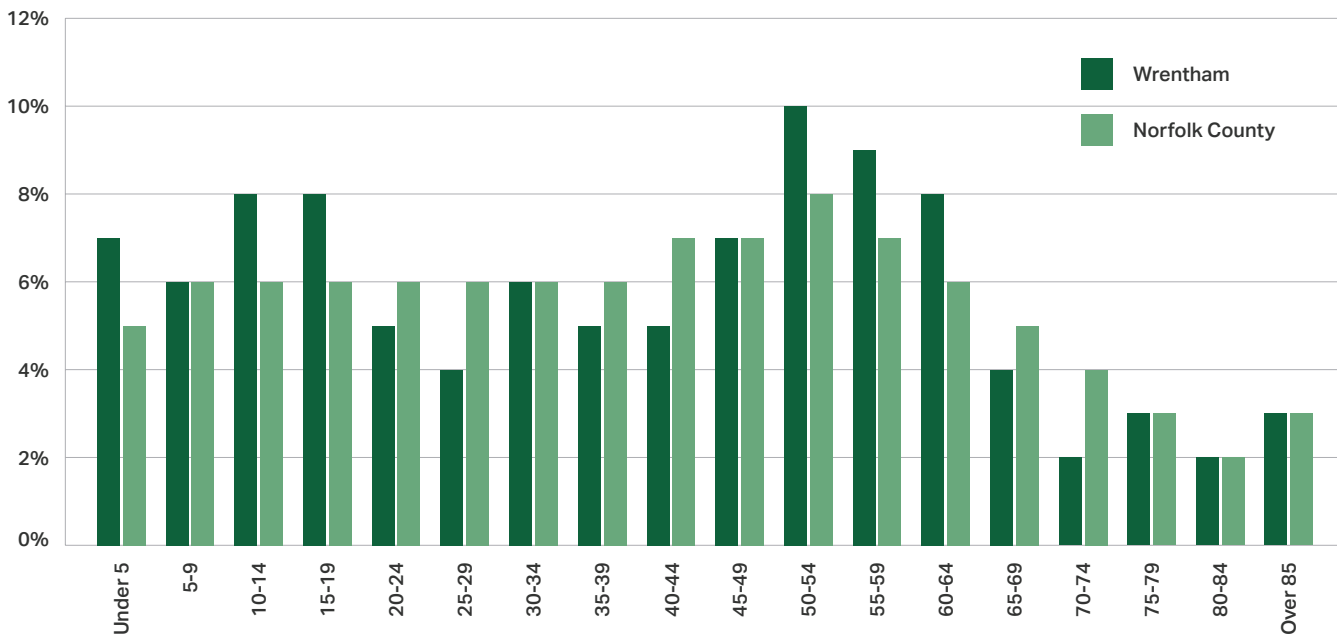
Figure Intro-2: Households with Senior vs. with Children 2007-2016



5 MassDOT, 2018, MAPC 2011
6 ibid

Figure Intro-3 shows the population by age of Wrentham compared to that of Norfolk County, according to the most recent data. A greater portion of Wrentham's population is under the age of 18 and between 50 and 65 years old than in the County as a whole.

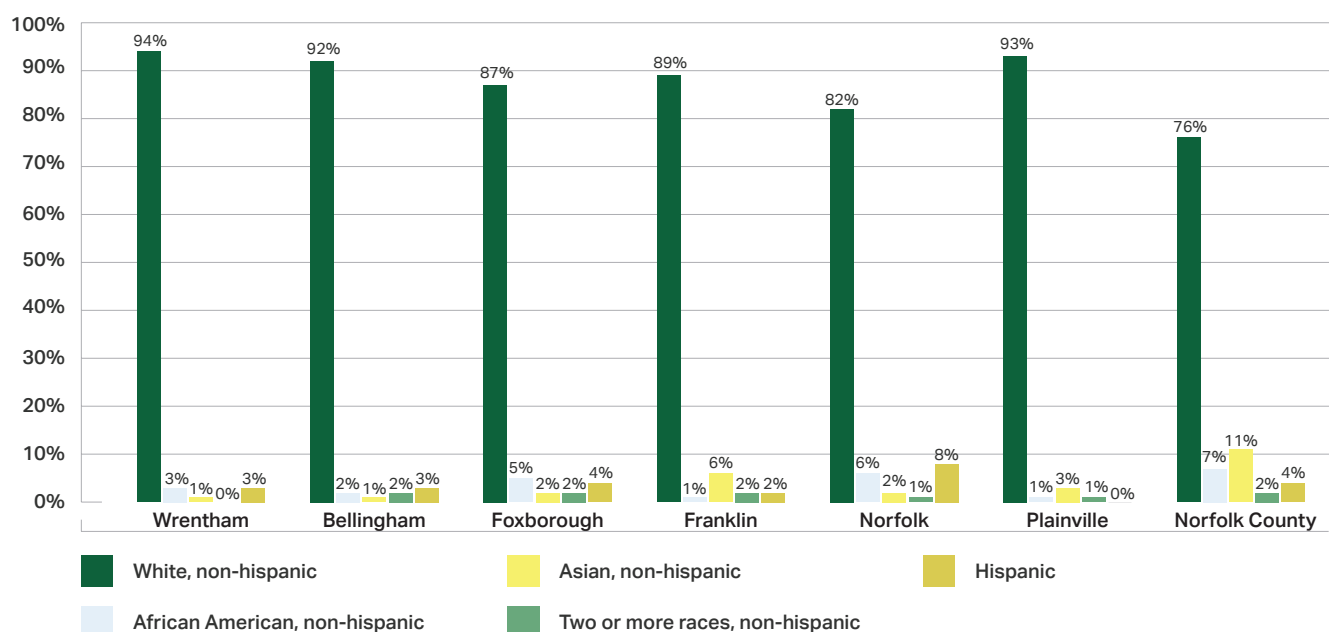
Figure Intro-3: Population by Age in Wrentham and Norfolk County



Source: ACS 5-Year Averages

Similar to neighboring towns, Wrentham lacks racial diversity with 94% of the population identifying as white. In comparison, 76% of the population of Norfolk County is white, 11% is Asian American, and seven percent is African American. More than one in 20 households, or six percent of households, speak a language other than English at home. Most of these languages are Slavic, including Russian. In addition, six percent of Wrentham residents were born outside of the United States.

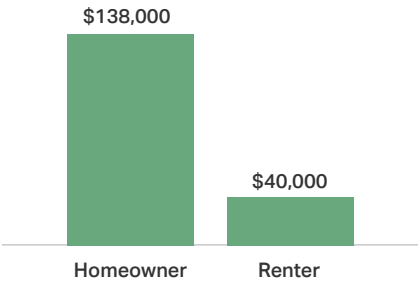
Figure Intro-4: Population by Race



Source: ACS 5-Year Averages

The median income is \$113,000 compared to \$100,000 in the County. In addition, between 350 and 800 residents live below the poverty line, defined as a family of four making less than \$24,000 annually. Income is correlated with age in Wrentham—older residents have lower incomes than middle-aged residents. There is not enough data to determine whether income is correlated with race. As shown in Figure Intro-5, there is an overwhelming disparity between the incomes of Wrentham residents who own their homes and those who rent their homes.

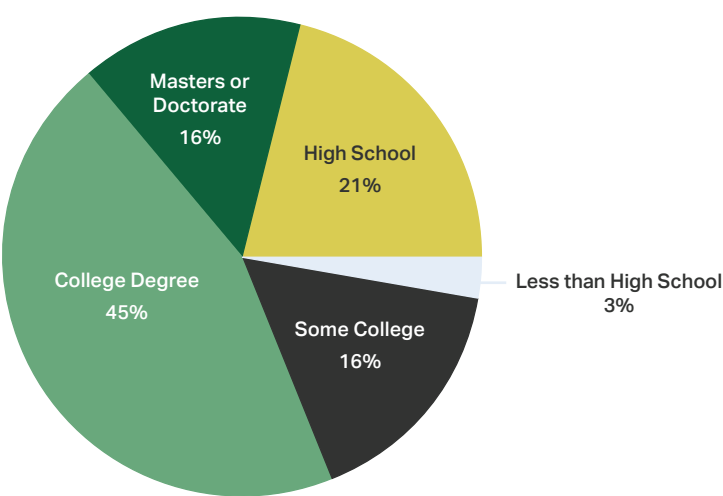
Figure Intro-5: Household Income by Tenure



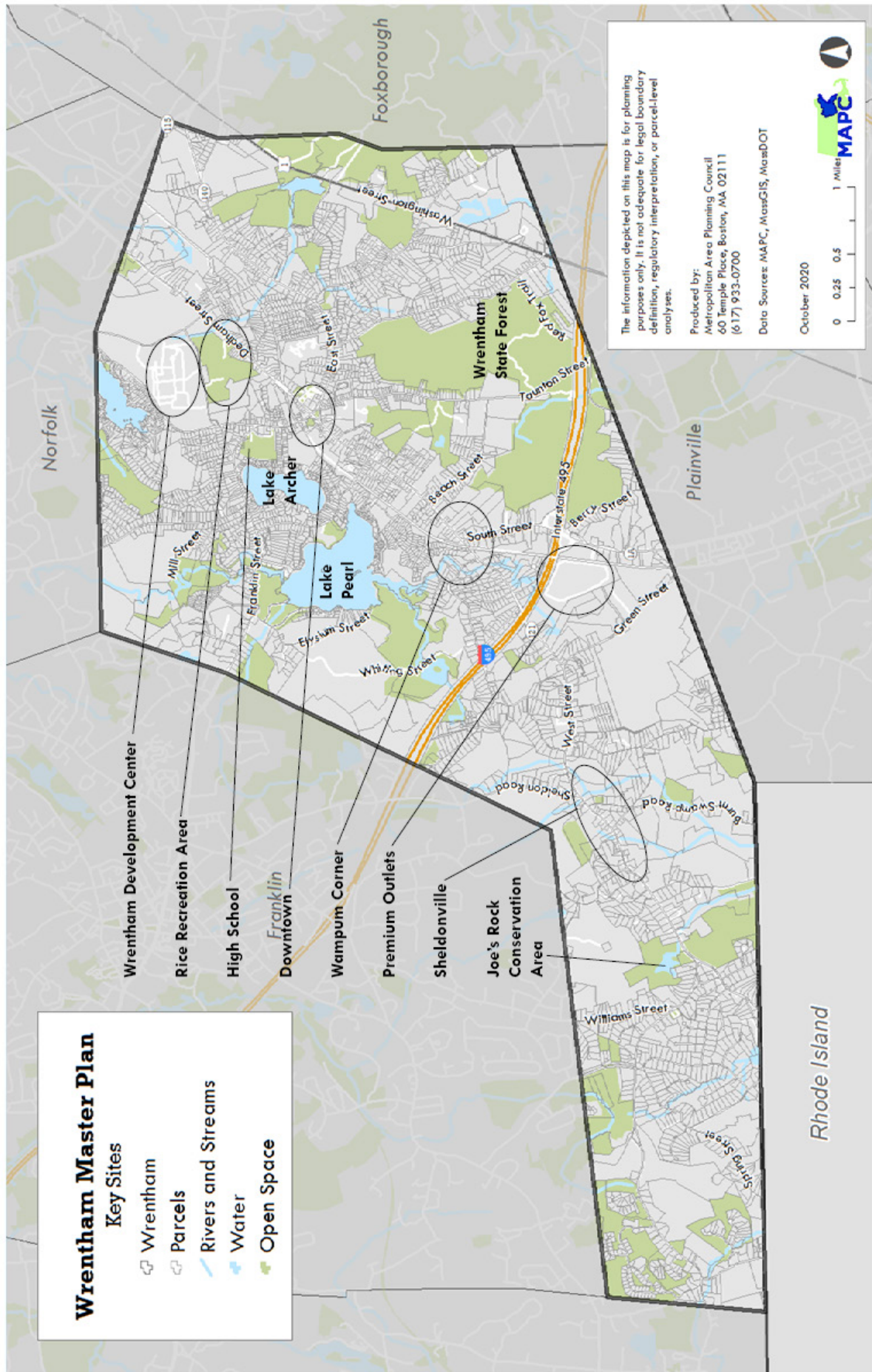
Source: ACS 5-Year Averages

The educational attainment of residents varies widely. More than 60% of adults have at least a college degree, including 16% of the Town’s population that has a Masters or Doctorate. Sixty percent of the County’s population also has a college degree or higher. Whereas there is a substantial population in Wrentham who have earned advanced degrees, 1 in 4 residents have their high school degree or less and have not attended any college classes.

Figure Intro-6: Educational Attainment



Source: ACS 5-Year Averages



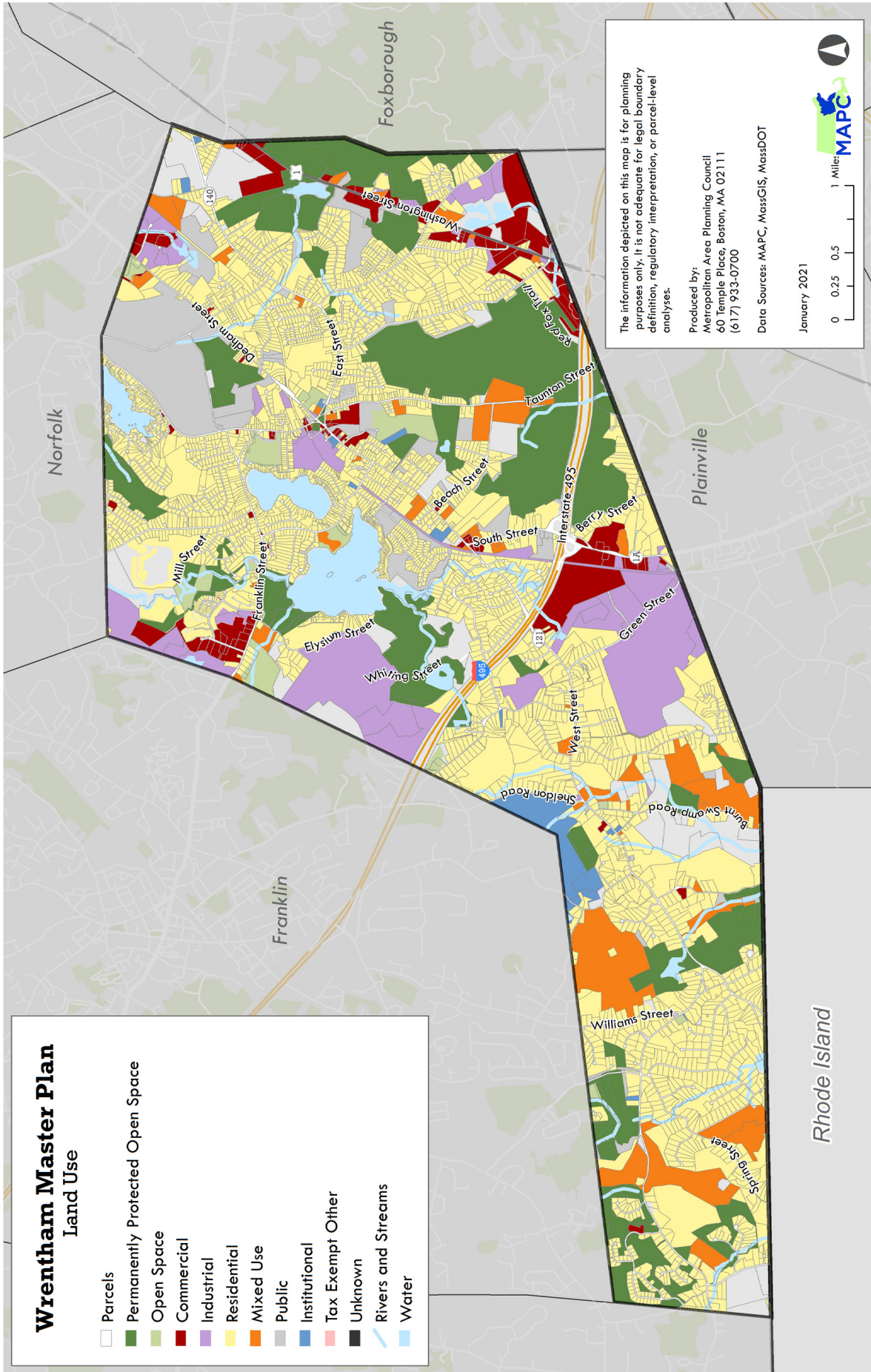
Place

The Town covers approximately 23 square miles of rolling forest, wetlands, and a few remaining farms. Lake Archer and Lake Pearl are defining features of Wrentham, providing scenic views and a shared attraction for residential neighborhoods, and Lake Pearl offers public recreation at Sweatt Beach. Route 1A is the main spine of town running from the northern border with Norfolk to Downtown where it becomes South Street until it connects with Interstate 495. It is lined with older homes, businesses, and residential developments. Route 1 runs along the eastern side of Wrentham through wetlands and conservation land. It is spotted with auto-oriented commercial development and industry serving the motorists and trucks travelling between Boston, Providence, and Gillette Stadium. A new large development at the intersection with Interstate 495 provides new homes, restaurants, an assisted living facility, two hotels, and other businesses. The Interstate runs east-west and bisects the Town, with the lakes, Downtown, and Route 1 to the north, and the outlets, larger properties, and agricultural land to the south. The Rice Recreation Area and the High School provide public recreation facilities near Downtown.

The map on the next page illustrates the land use according to the Assessor's data. Most of the land in Wrentham is currently used for residential purposes. There are two large industrial areas with active quarries to the west of Lake Pearl and south of the Premium Outlets. Areas of conserved open space are distributed throughout town, with the largest being the Wrentham State Forest in the southeastern area of Town, as well as along Route 1.



Photo Credit: Mark Cuddy



Document Path: K:\DataServices\Projects\Current\Projects\Master_Plans\Wrentham\ProjectFiles\WrenthamMasterPlan_LandUse3.mxd

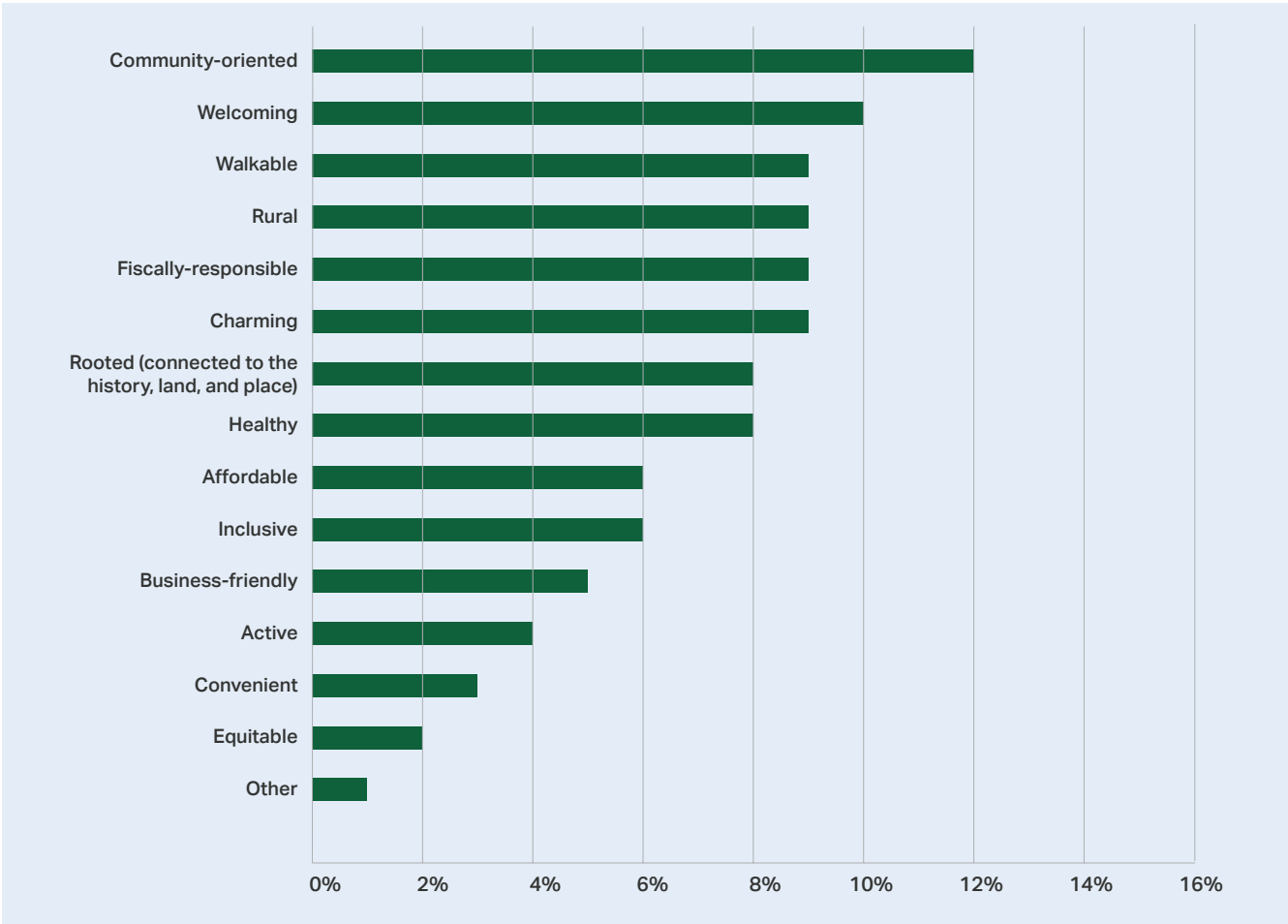
Community Visioning Survey Findings

At the beginning of the planning process, a Community Visioning Survey was widely distributed throughout Town. A postcard with a link to the online survey was mailed to every household; a press release was sent to local media; paper versions of the survey were available at Town Hall; Town staff and Steering Committee members reached out to the schools, small businesses, senior center, youth groups, and civic organizations; and staff and Steering Committee members shared emails and social media posts. Over 1,300 people participated in the survey, including 1,000 of whom provided full survey responses.

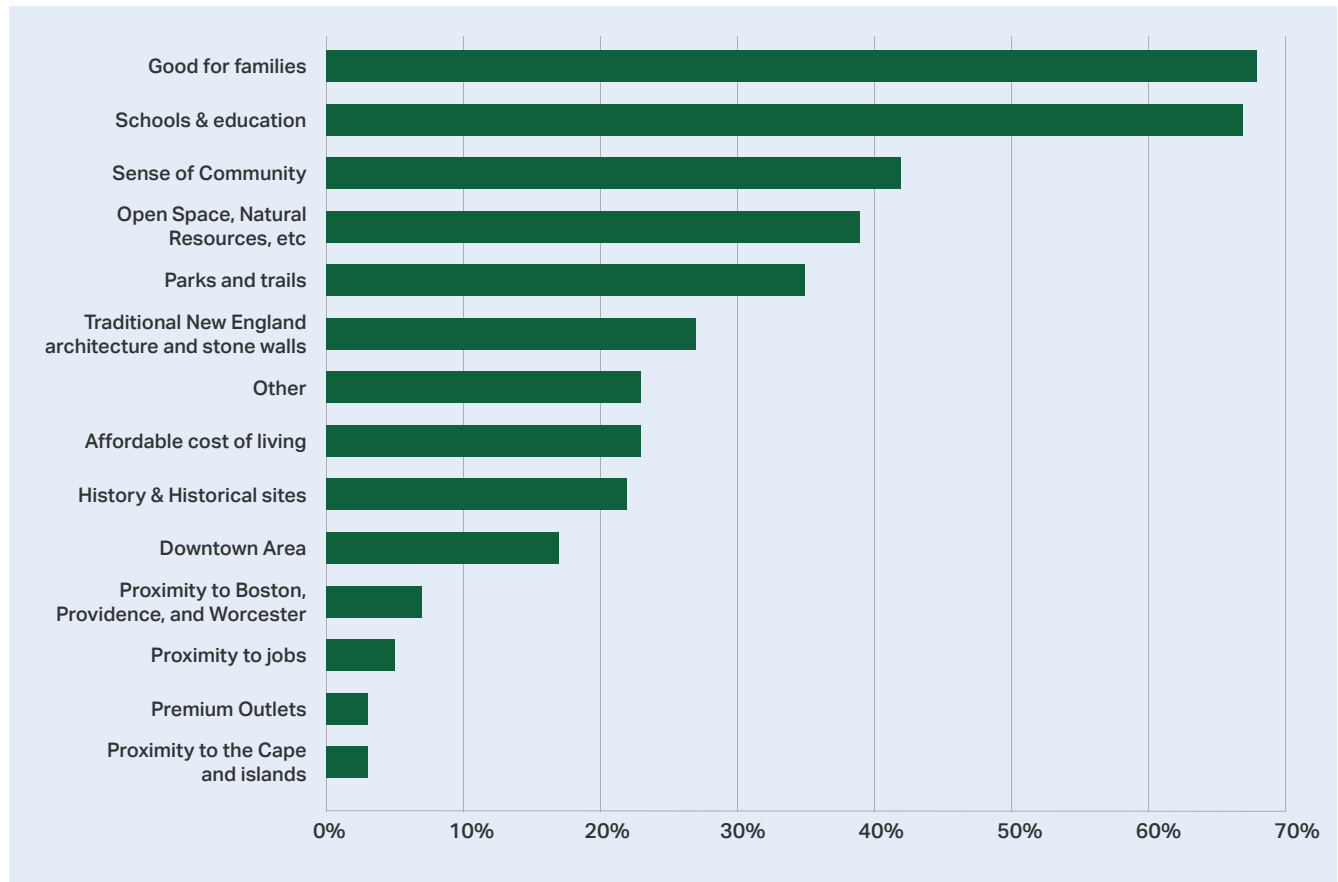
According to the survey, Wrentham’s greatest strengths are: being good for families, the schools and education, the sense of community, and the open space, natural resources, and farmland. The words that best describe respondents’ aspirations for Wrentham are: community-oriented, welcoming, and walkable. These strengths and aspirations were central throughout the planning process, including in the development of the Vision, as well as in the development of the Goals and Strategies.

The following pages illustrate the responses to some of the key questions in the survey.

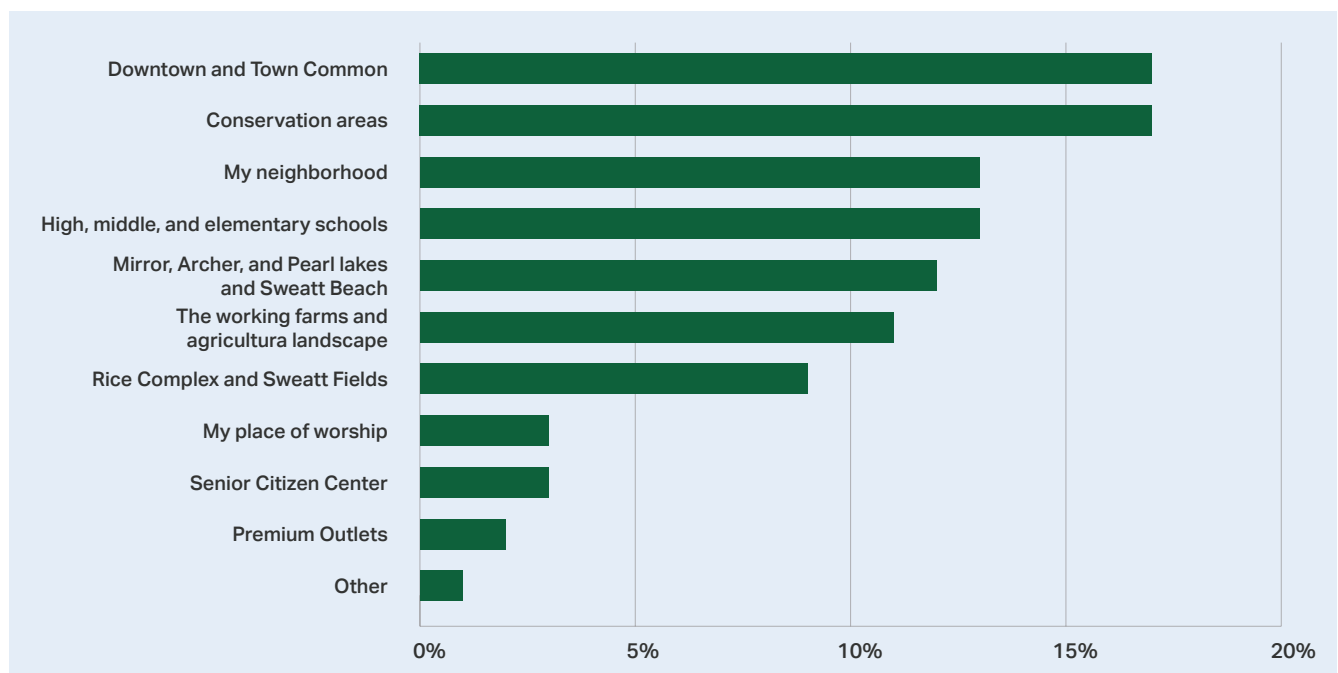
Which set of words best describe your aspirations for Wrentham?



What are Wrentham's greatest strengths?



Which places in Wrentham are most meaningful to you? Please choose up to 5.

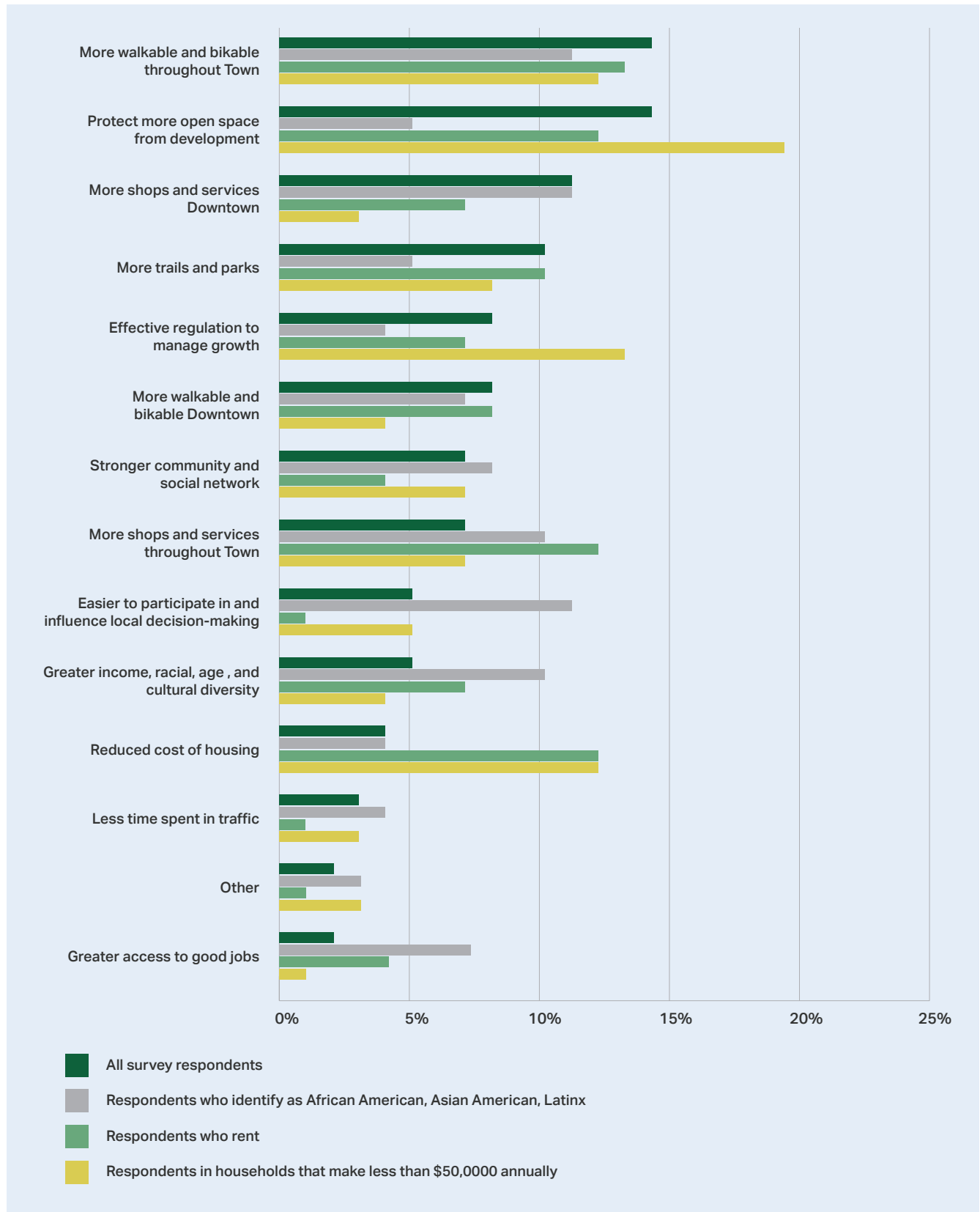


Given the demographics of the respondents compared to the demographics of the full Wrentham population, the survey underrepresents renters, households with low-incomes, and may underrepresent residents of color, although the data is too limited to determine. Because of this, the analysis examines responses from these demographic subgroups for certain questions. Of note, the responses only reflect the perspectives of individuals, and should not be interpreted as representing the perspective of all individuals of each demographic. However, this focused analysis illustrates the commonalities and differences in lived experience in Wrentham across different survey respondents. For example, there are differences in which improvements would most improve quality of life for different stakeholders. One of the most highly supported improvements for respondents of color is to make it easier to participate in and influence local decision-making. This improvement was not as important for lower-income respondents or renters, demonstrating a difference in the experience of residents based on race, not income. The responses by demographic are illustrated to show the differences in responses. Again, the number of responses for each demographic group is small and does not represent the views of whole demographic group.



Source: Diane Glass

Which improvements would most increase your quality of life? Please choose up to 5.



Existing Conditions Assessment:

Economic Development

The existing conditions assessment focuses on the Wrentham workforce, including both the residents of Wrentham and the people who work in Wrentham; jobs and businesses in Wrentham; commercial and industrial districts; and the municipal budget. The analysis is based on the most recent data available, which varies based on the data source. As explained in the Housing Chapter, the most recent source of Census data is the US Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Average from 2014-2018. Data related to the municipal budget is more recent from fiscal years 2020 or 2021.

The quantitative data analysis must be understood within the context of the community's feedback, which provides insight into the lived experience of Wrentham residents and businesses. The community feedback was gathered through town-wide surveys, focus groups, and discussion with the Wrentham Economic Development Commission, as explained in the Introduction.

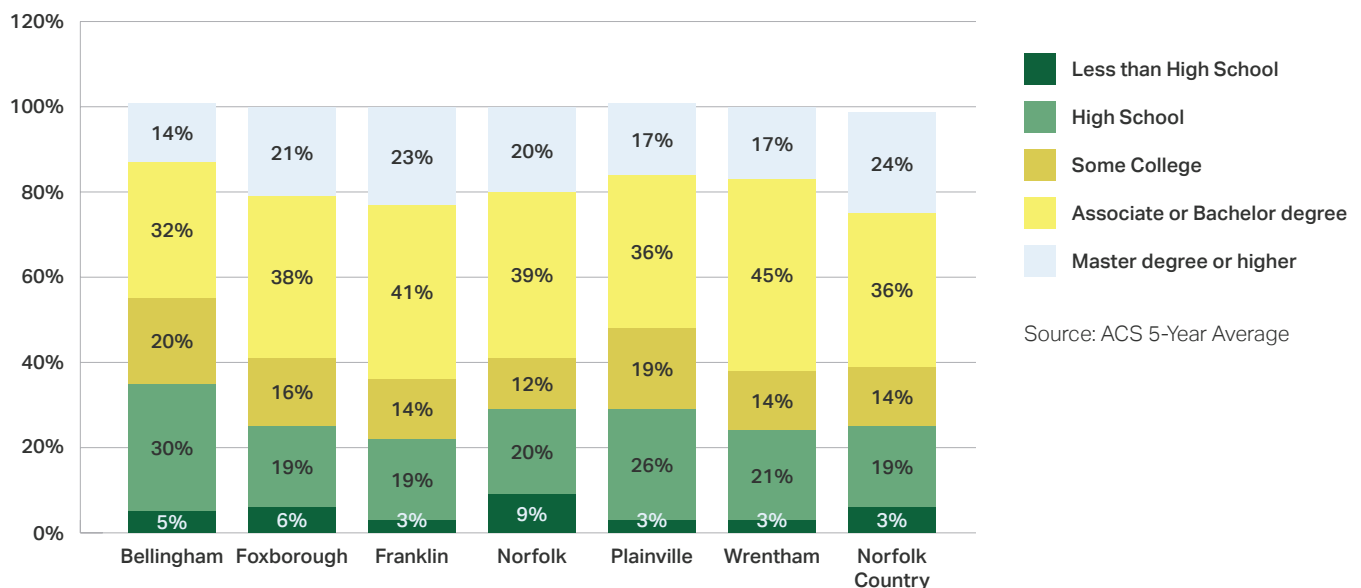
Workforce

There are 6,235 residents eligible for the workforce, as defined as aged 25-64 years. Between 2014-2018, the five-year average unemployment rate in Wrentham was 5.0%, the same as Norfolk County's.⁷

Educational attainment

The educational attainment of residents varies widely.⁸ More than 60% of adults have at least a college degree, including 16% of the Town's population that has a Masters or Doctorate. Sixty percent of the County's population also has a college degree or higher. Although there is a substantial population in Wrentham who have earned advanced degrees, 1 in 4 residents have their high school degree or less and have not attended a college class. In other words, there are more residents with a high school degree or less than there are residents with a Master degree. Figure ED-1 compares the educational attainment of Wrentham's population to neighboring towns and the County at large. Franklin, which has a similar median income to Wrentham, has more residents with Masters degrees or higher.

Figure ED-1: Educational Attainment, 2016



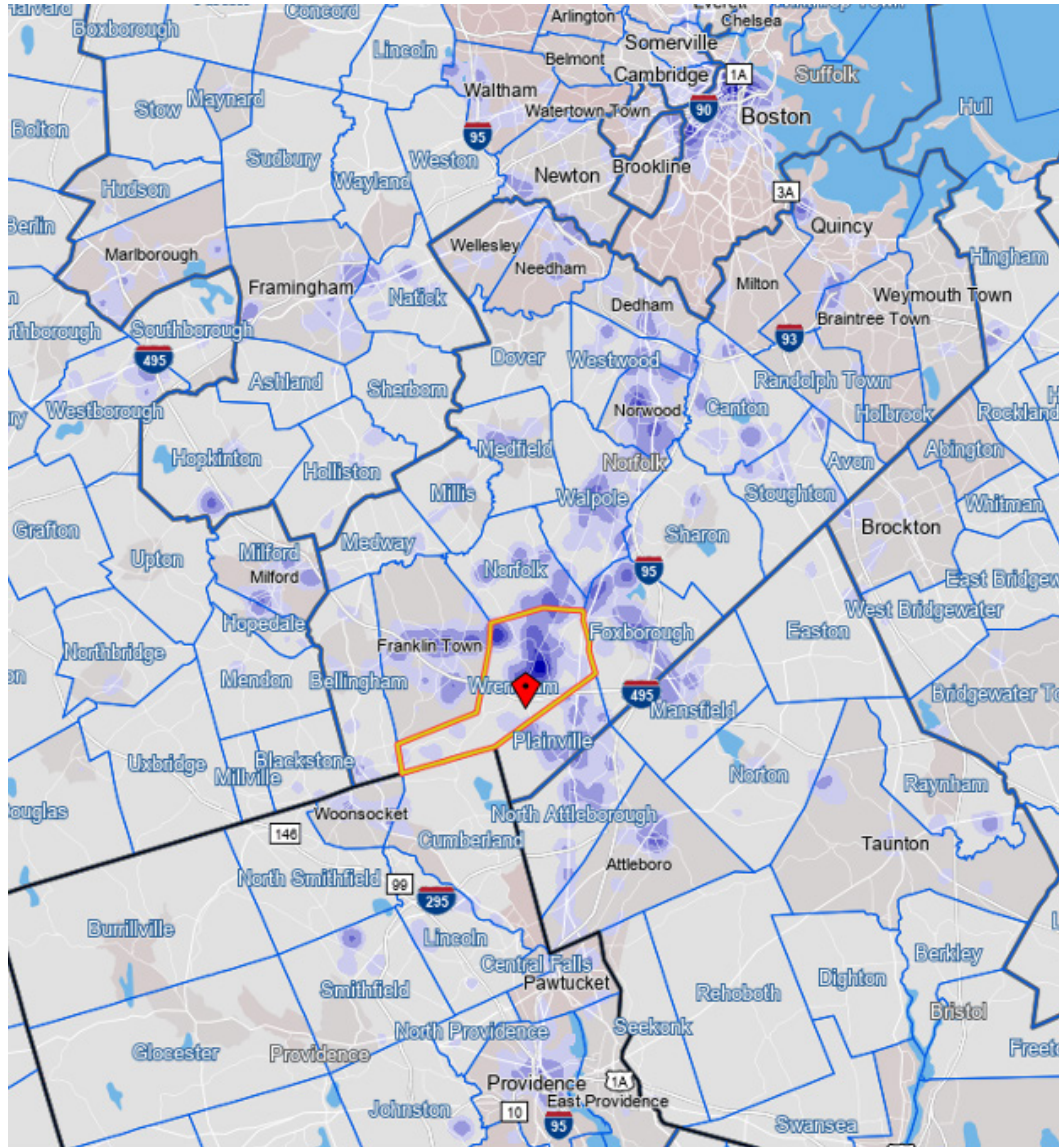
⁷ ACS 5-Year Averages

⁸ Residents 25 years and over

Location of Jobs and Commute of Wrentham Residents

Most residents work northeast of Wrentham in Boston, as well as in Walpole and Norwood. Figure ED-2 illustrates the location of resident's jobs with the darker purple color representing higher concentrations of jobs at which Wrentham residents work.

Figure ED-2: Where Wrentham Residents Work, 2018



Source: US Census

Fifty-two percent of Wrentham residents spend more than an hour commuting each day, and 21% of residents spend more than two hours commuting each day. Figure ED-3 illustrates the one-way commute time for Wrentham residents. The commute times are similar to those of residents in Bellingham, Foxborough, and Franklin. More residents in Norfolk have long commutes, and more residents in Plainville have short commutes. The data is too limited to identify changes in the length of commutes over time, however, there has been an increase in the number of and overall percentage of commuters who commute by transit, as shown in Figure ED-4. While most residents drive to work, 10%, or one in 10 residents, commute by transit. Wrentham is located between two commuter rail lines. The closest stations on the Franklin Line are in Norfolk and Franklin, providing approximately an hour-long train ride to South Station, Boston during the morning commute. The closest station on the Providence/Stoughton line are in Sharon and Mansfield, providing approximately a 40-minute train ride to South Station, Boston or a 40-minute train ride to Providence.

Figure ED-3: One-Way Commute Time for Wrentham Residents, 2016

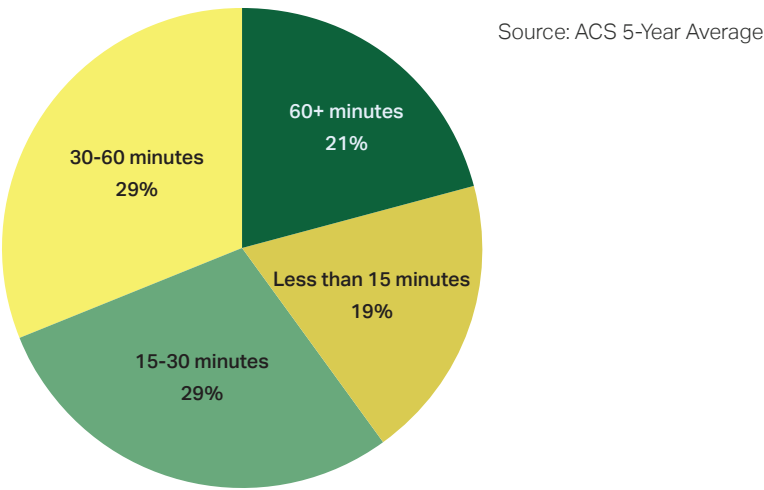
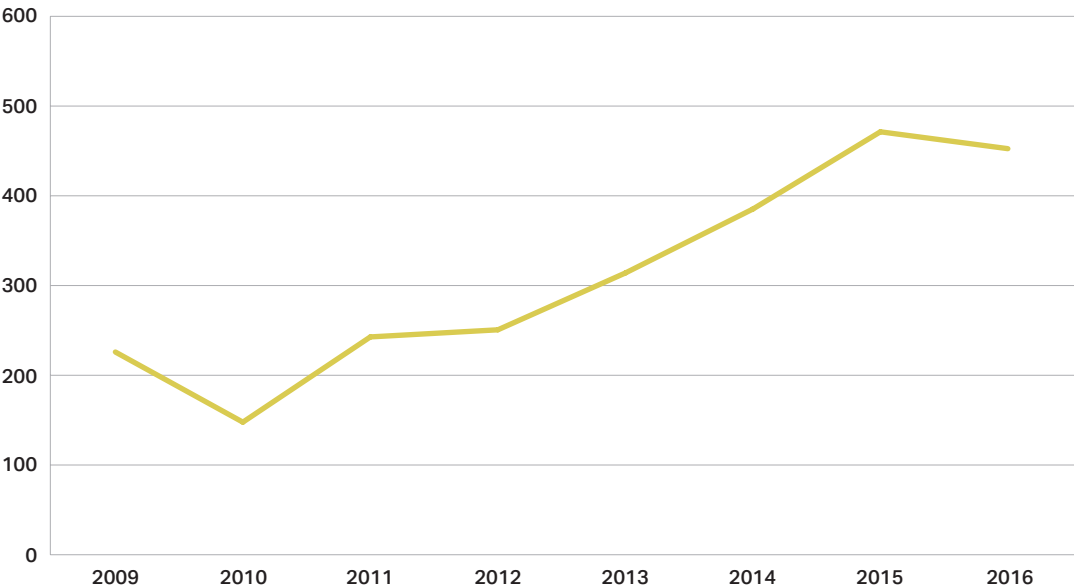


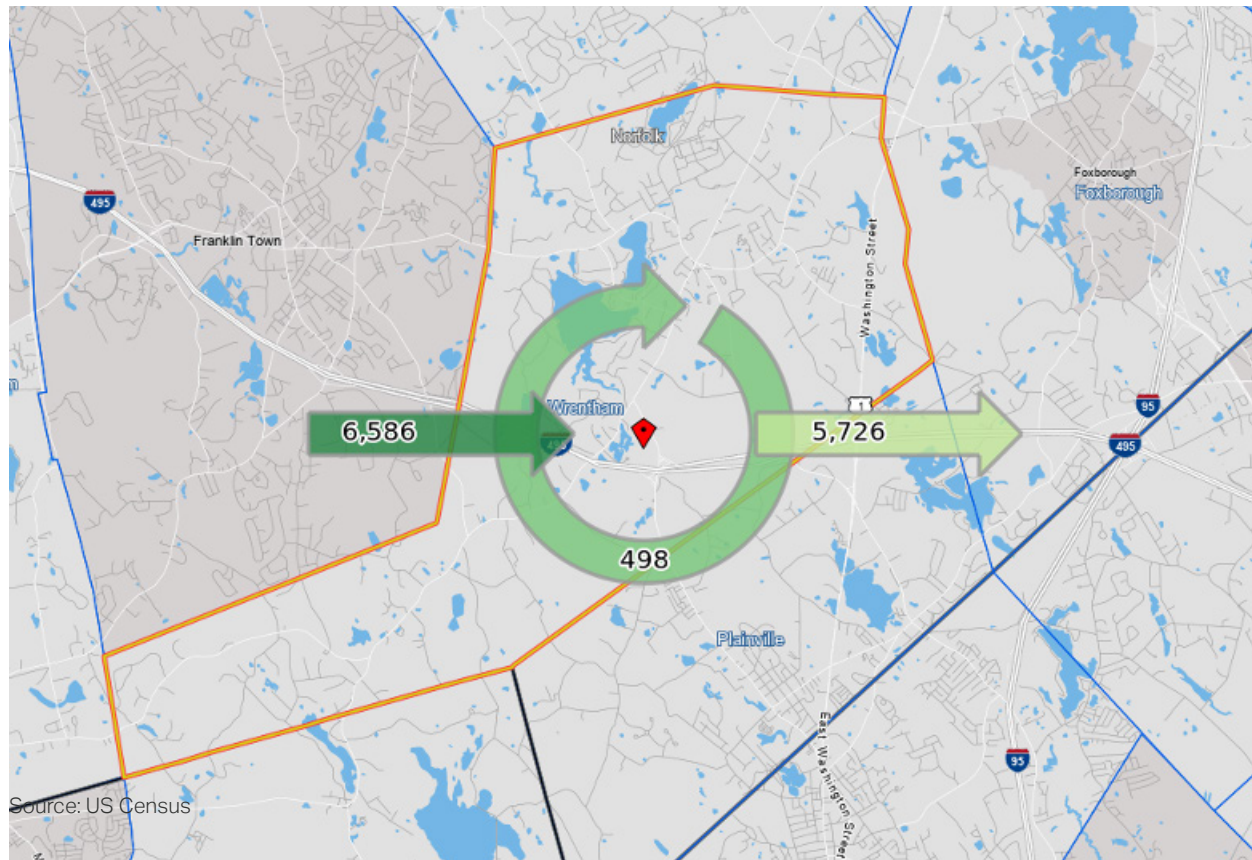
Figure ED-4: Growth in Number of Residents who Commute by Transit



Source: ACS 5-Year Average

This pattern of residents commuting to the large city within a metropolitan area is not new or uncommon. However, Wrentham is not a traditional “bedroom” community in which most people leave town during the day. In fact, there are more jobs in Wrentham than workers—in 2016, there were 7,400 jobs and 6,200 residents in the labor force.⁹ Figure ED-5 illustrates the daily flow of people in and out of Wrentham—a large number of people come to Wrentham to work (6,586 workers according to this data source), a large number of residents leave to work (5,726 residents), and a relatively small number of residents stay and work in town (498 residents).¹⁰ Approximately 40% of the people who work in Wrentham work at the Premium Outlets, accounting for a substantial portion of the daily inflow of workers.

Figure ED-5: Inflow and Outflow of Workers, 2016



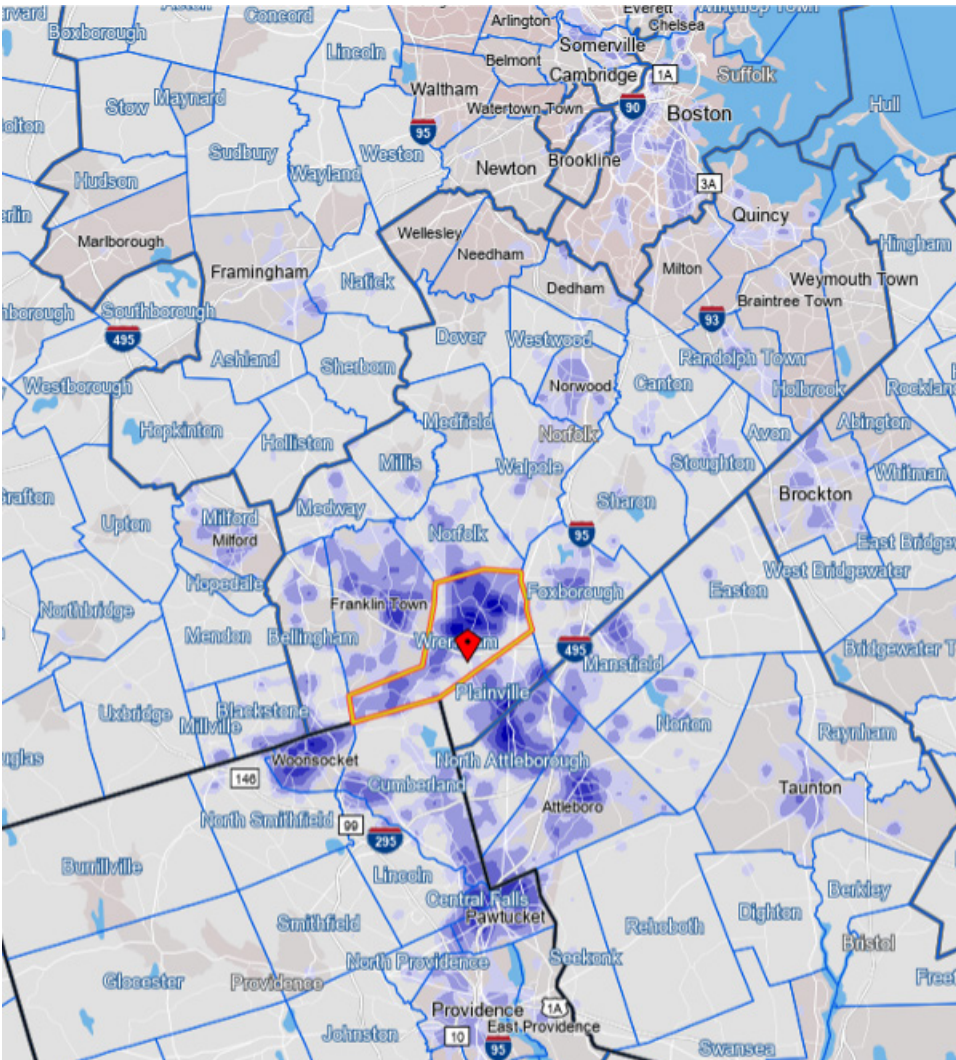
9 Source: ACS 5-Year Average, U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2016).

10 U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2018).

People who work in Wrentham

The people who work in Wrentham mostly come from locations south of town, including Plainville and Attleboro, as well as Woonsocket and Central Falls in Rhode Island. The residential locations of people who work in Wrentham is shown in Figure ED-6 with areas of darker purple showing higher concentrations of residential locations.

Figure ED-6: Where People who Work in Wrentham Live, 2018



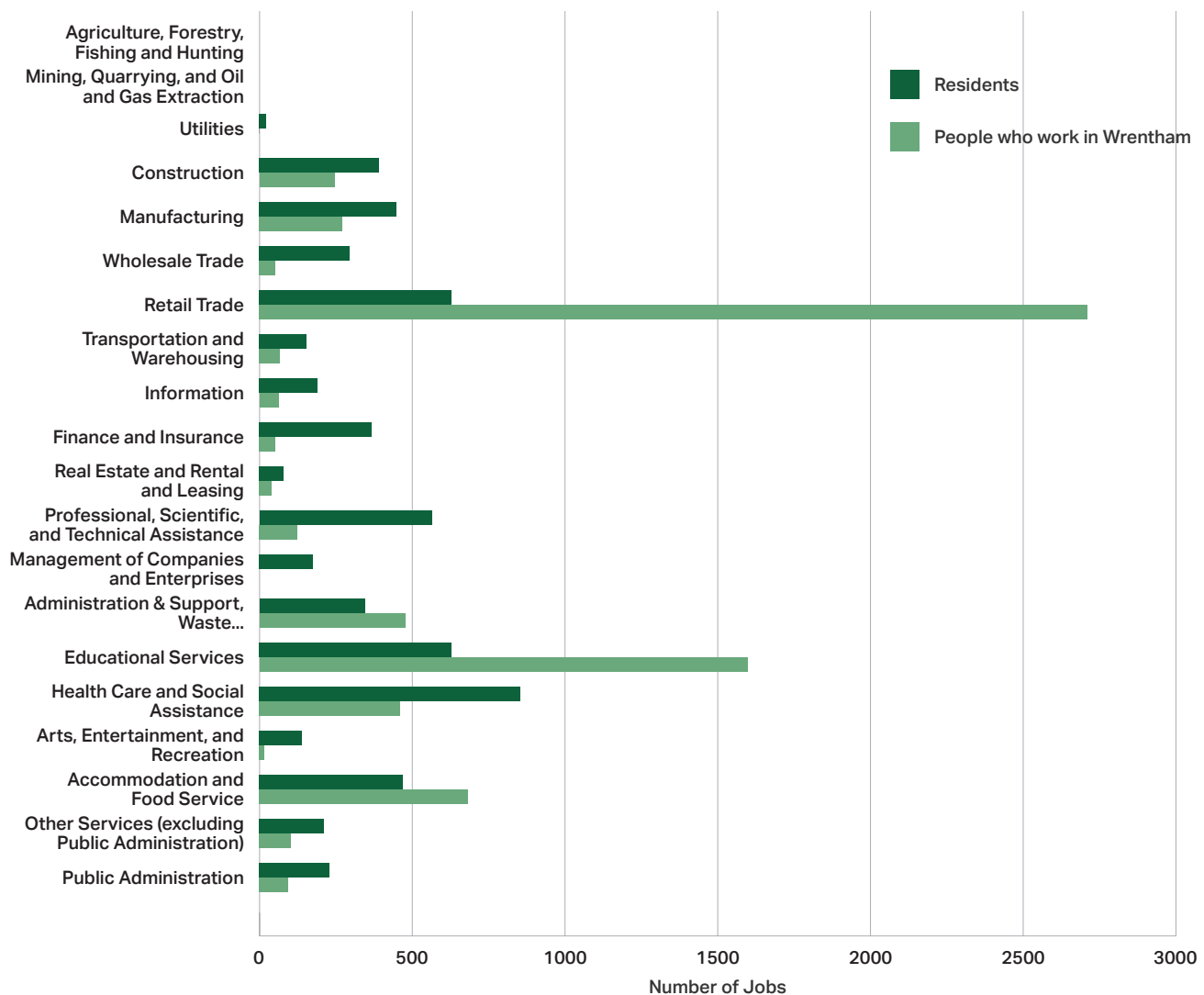
Source: US Census

Workforce and Jobs Mismatch

One potential reason for the mismatch between the residents of Wrentham and the people who work in Wrentham is that the jobs in Wrentham do not match the education and skills of residents. Wrentham residents hold a variety of jobs in Health Care and Social Assistance; Retail Trade; Educational Services; Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Manufacturing; and other industry sectors. In comparison, the types of jobs in Wrentham are concentrated in only two sectors: Retail Trade and Educational Services.¹¹ Figure ED-7 compares the types of jobs held by residents and the types of jobs held by people who work in Wrentham.

Another potential reason for the mismatch is that the housing in Wrentham does not meet the needs of workers in Wrentham. The Housing chapter further analyzes the housing supply and demand in Wrentham.

Figure ED-7: Jobs of residents vs. Jobs of people who work in Wrentham, 2018



11 U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2018).

Business and Employees

Jobs by Industry

Table ED-1 shows the number of jobs and businesses by industry in Wrentham, as well as the average weekly wages and average annual wages of each job. As illustrated in Figure ED-7 above, jobs in Wrentham are concentrated in Retail Trade and Educational Services, which are also among the lowest paid jobs. The annual wage of someone working retail in Wrentham is \$21,360 and \$48,384 for someone in Educational Services.¹² In comparison, the median income of someone who lives in Wrentham is \$113,017. Many of the retail employees are 29 years old or younger, however about half (approximately 1,300) are 30 years or older.¹³ Therefore, the impression that the vast majority of people who work at the Outlets are high schoolers is inaccurate.

Table ED-1: Jobs and Wages in Wrentham by Industry, 2018

Industry	Jobs	Businesses	Average Weekly Wage	Average Annual Wage
Construction	268	62	\$1,156	\$55,488
Wholesale Trade	48	23	\$1,591	\$76,368
Retail Trade	2,613	172	\$445	\$21,360
Transportation and Warehousing	78	10	\$1,189	\$57,072
Information	55	8	\$1,663	\$79,824
Finance and Insurance	65	16	\$1,848	\$88,704
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	36	10	\$1,172	\$56,256
Professional and Technical Services	136	50	\$1,561	\$74,928
Administrative and Waste Services	471	31	\$876	\$42,048
Educational Services	1,328	10	\$1,008	\$48,384
Health Care and Social Assistance	473	50	\$757	\$36,336
Accommodation and Food Services	772	24	\$466	\$22,368
Other Services, Except Public Administration	109	30	\$701	\$33,648
Public Administration	135	9	\$1,385	\$66,480
Total, All Industries	6,914	516	\$749	\$35,952

Source: Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)

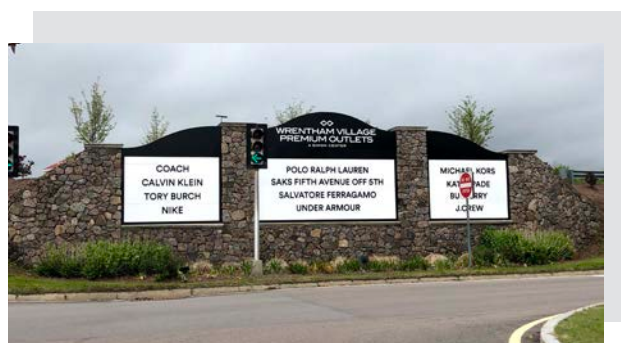
¹² Some workers may hold more than one job, so the annual wage may not correlate to the annual income of each worker.

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2018).

Jobs in Wrentham have been concentrated in retail and education since at least 2004 at the time of the last Master Plan. Table ED-2 shows the change in the number of jobs and establishments in Wrentham by industry between 2005 and 2018. The table is color coded to identify those industries that have gained or lost a substantial percentage of jobs and/or establishments. More than 25% of jobs in the Manufacturing, Wholesale Trade, and Real Estate and Rental and Leasing industries have been lost since 2005. The number of jobs in Retail Trade, Information, Administrative and Waste Services, and Other Services have increased. However, the number of jobs in these industries, other than Retail Trade, is minimal. The growth in jobs in the past 13 years has almost all been in the Retail Trade—Wrentham gained approximately 1,000 jobs between 2005 and 2018, and 842 of those were in the Retail Trade. More than 75% of the jobs in Retail Trade in Wrentham are in clothing and clothing accessories stores, presumably at the Wrentham Premium Outlets.

Uncertainty in the Retail Sector

With the increase in online shopping over the past few years, and the rapid acceleration of this trend due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the future of brick-and-mortar retail is uncertain.¹⁴ Some retailers are shifting location from shopping malls to “Lifestyle Centers”, which combine the traditional retail functions of a shopping mall with dining, entertainment, and other leisure amenities. Lifestyle Centers are also distinct from shopping malls as they often include mixed-use and residential development rather than entirely commercial uses; upscale national-chain specialty stores (e.g. Pottery Barn, Crate & Barrel, etc.) serve as anchors rather than department stores (e.g. Macy’s, Sears, etc.); have smaller footprints of 320,000 square feet on average nationally rather than 800,000 square feet; and they are often mostly outdoors along walkways or internal streets rather than enclosed within a building.



14 Jordyn Holman, Lauren Coleman-Lochner, “Stores that defined American Mall eye a freestanding future”, Boston Globe, March 22, 2021 <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/03/22/business/stores-that-defined-american-malls-eye-freestanding-future/?s_campaign=8315>

Table ED-2. Change in Jobs and Establishments in Wrentham by Industry, 2005-2018

		2005	2018	Change	% Change
Construction	Jobs	271	268	(3)	-1%
	Establishments	57	62	5	9%
Manufacturing*	Jobs	457	315	(142)	-31%
	Establishments	13	8	(5)	-38%
Wholesale Trade	Jobs	147	48	(99)	-67%
	Establishments	25	23	(2)	-8%
Retail Trade	Jobs	1,771	2,613	842	48%
	Establishments	135	172	37	27%
Transportation and Warehousing	Jobs	48	78	30	63%
	Establishments	9	10	1	11%
Information	Jobs	33	55	22	67%
	Establishments	6	8	2	33%
Finance and Insurance	Jobs	70	65	(5)	-7%
	Establishments	15	16	1	7%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	Jobs	54	36	(18)	-33%
	Establishments	11	10	(1)	-9%
Professional and Technical Services	Jobs	136	136	-	0%
	Establishments	39	50	11	28%
Administrative and Waste Services	Jobs	156	471	315	202%
	Establishments	23	31	8	35%
Educational Services	Jobs	1,331	1,328	(3)	0%
	Establishments	7	10	3	43%
Health Care and Social Assistance	Jobs	449	473	24	5%
	Establishments	22	50	28	127%
Accommodation and Food Services	Jobs	742	772	30	4%
	Establishments	28	24	(4)	-14%
Other Services, Ex. Public Admin	Jobs	86	109	23	27%
	Establishments	31	30	(1)	-3%
Public Administration	Jobs	122	135	13	11%
	Establishments	7	9	2	29%
Total, All Industries	Jobs	5,915	6,914	999	17%
	Establishments	433	516	83	19%

Source: Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)

Notes:

* The number of jobs and Establishments in Manufacturing in Wrentham in 2018 is unavailable, therefore the jobs and Establishments in 2017 is shown here.

Size of Establishments

The largest employers are listed in Table ED-3. Five are located at the Premium Outlets, three are related to schools, and two are industrial. This data should be understood within context, as it may include inaccuracies and has been generalized to preserve confidentiality. The vast majority of businesses in Wrentham are located at the Premium Outlets. As of 2016, there were approximately 519 businesses in the Premium Outlets.¹⁵

Capstan Atlantic, located at the northern end of Route 1A, expanded its facilities in Wrentham in 2016 after entering a tax increment financing (TIF) agreement with the Town. A TIF is a tool used by municipal governments to stimulate economic development in a targeted geographical area. TIFs are used to finance redevelopment projects or other investments based on the anticipated increase in tax revenue from the new development. In the case of Capstan in Wrentham, Capstan was exempted from property tax increases for a period of 10 years, thus subsidizing their multi-million dollar investment in expanding their facility and increasing the number of employees.

Table ED-3: Largest Employers, 2016

Company Name	Address	Type of Establishment	Number of Employees
Bloomingdale's	1 Premium Outlet Blvd # 5	Department Stores	100-249
Gap Outlet	1 Premium Outlet Blvd # 360	Factory Outlets	100-249
Tlc Cleaning Co	50 Industrial Rd	Janitor Service	100-249
Capstan Atlantic	10 Cushing Dr	Metal-Powder-Fabricators (Mfrs)	100-249
Cracker Barrel Old Country Str	1048 South St # 40	Restaurants	100-249
Ruby Tuesday	1 Premium Outlet Blvd # 800	Restaurants	100-249
Delaney Vogel School	120 Taunton St	Schools	100-249
King Philip High School	201 Franklin St	Schools	100-249
Wrentham School Superintendent	120 Taunton St	Schools	100-249

Source: InfoGroup 2016

¹⁵ InfoGroup 2016. This number may be an overestimate, as according to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, there were a total of 510 establishments in all industries in Wrentham in 2016. Both the data from InfoGroup nor the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development may have inaccuracies.

Regardless of the concentration of businesses at the Premium Outlets, most businesses in Wrentham are small businesses. Half of the businesses employ fewer than 5 employees, and 22% employ less than 10 employees, as shown in Figure ED-8. This proportion is similar to that of neighboring towns, except for Norfolk where more businesses, 60%, employ fewer than five employees.¹⁶

Figure ED-8. Businesses by # of Employees, 2016

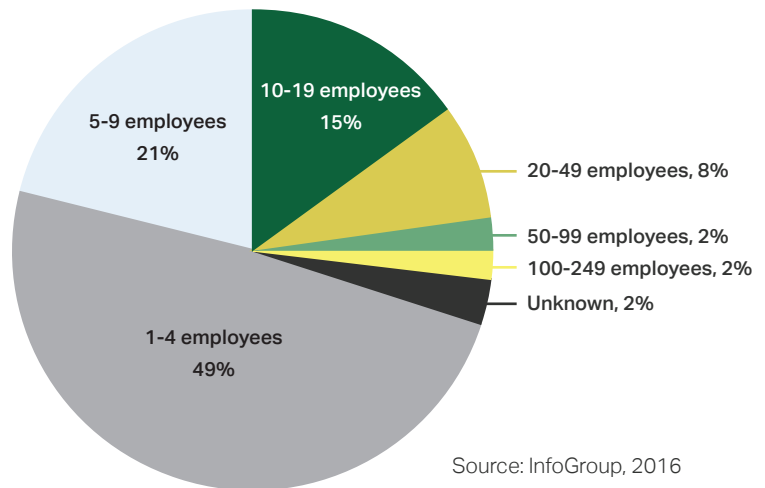


Table ED-4 shows the number of businesses in Wrentham and surrounding towns by number of employees. Although Wrentham has a similar proportion of small businesses, it lacks larger businesses employing more than 250 workers. In comparison, Franklin has five businesses employing 500-999 people, and both Bellingham and Foxborough have at least one business that employs more than 1,000 people.

Table ED-4. Businesses by Number of Employees, 2016

# of Employees	Number of Businesses					
	Wrentham	Bellingham	Foxboro	Franklin	Norfolk	Plainville
1-4	264	323	450	587	200	236
5-9	114	136	200	261	60	105
10-19	79	65	100	131	23	38
20-49	44	52	65	111	16	37
50-99	12	10	23	40	5	7
100-249	10	9	19	26	5	7
250-499	0	1	1	5	1	0
500-999	0	0	1	2	0	0
1000-4999	0	0	2	0	0	0
5000-9999	0	1	0	0	0	0
Unknown	18	34	34	47	10	20
Total businesses	541	631	895	1210	320	450

Source: InfoGroup, 2016

¹⁶ InfoGroup, 2016

Commercial/Industrial Districts

The map on the next page shows the land use of each parcel in Wrentham, according to the Wrentham Tax Assessor. The dark red color indicates commercial land use. As shown in the figure, the commercial land uses are clustered at the following five main commercial districts, and potentially at a sixth along Route 1A in the north of town: Downtown, Wampum Corner, Premium Outlets, Route 1, and Route 140. Each district has a different character and provides different goods, services, and consumer experiences.

Downtown

Wrentham's Downtown has many of the characteristics of the quintessential, small New England town center. The Town Common provides a common focal point, and Sweatt Park provides additional recreational green space. A handful of local restaurants, retail and convenience stores, places of worship, historical landmarks, and civic uses (Town Hall and District Court) provide a balanced mix of destinations and services. The description of the Downtown in the 2004 Plan is accurate today: "It is the social heart of the town, a crossroads meeting of important regional roads (both State highways), and the formal face with its white steepled church fronting the Common."

The traditional design of the Downtown with small lots, relatively narrow streets, on-street parking, and buildings oriented to the sidewalk allows visitors to park and walk to multiple destinations without moving their car. Improvements to serve pedestrians, including fewer curb cuts and safer crosswalks, could help make it even more walkable. The recent Village Center District rezoning, as explained in the Introduction chapter, aims to further support an attractive, walkable downtown consistent with Wrentham's small town character. However, there are challenges to new investment. The Downtown lacks Town sewer, and one of the lots comprising the vacant site lacks frontage and access.

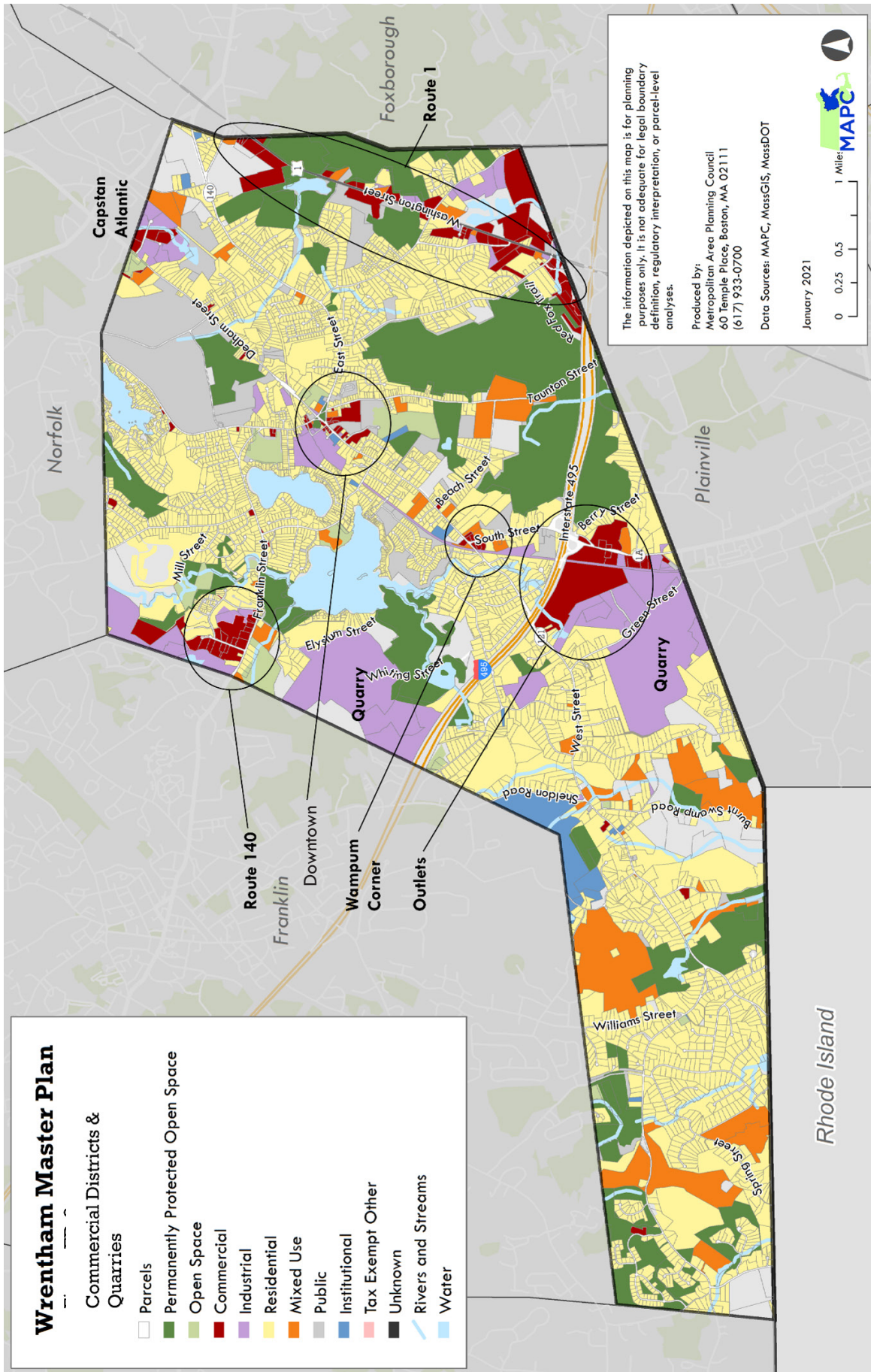
In addition, Capstan Atlantic, one of Wrentham's largest employers is located at the northern end of Route 1A a few miles from Downtown.

Wampum Corner

Less than two miles south of the Downtown on South Street is Wampum Corner at the junction of West Street and South Street. Wampum Corner was one of the first sites of settlement and has remained a small commercial center with a collection of local restaurants and retail and convenience stores.

Wrentham Premium Outlets

Built in 1997, the Premium Outlets on the southern side of Interstate 495, typifies the auto-oriented malls built in the mid-1990's. Most people know Wrentham because of the Outlets, coming from across the Boston region to go shopping. Anchored by the Nike Factory Store, Saks Off 5th, Levi's Outlet Store and others, the Outlets provides a substantial portion of the municipal tax base, as well as a large portion of the jobs in town.



Route 1

Route 1 is a four-lane State route that extends along the eastern side of Wrentham. Providing a connection between Boston and Providence, as well as access to Gillette Stadium (the home of the New England Patriots football team) just north of the Wrentham boundary in Foxborough and the Plainridge Park Casino just south of Wrentham in Plainville, it carries travelers from around the region. As such, commercial uses along Route 1 are auto-oriented: buildings are setback from the road with expansive parking lots on large lots. The uses are varied and cater to more regional needs (e.g. an animal hospital and go-kart track) and those who are driving through (e.g. a motel and truck stop). Light industrial uses, including an RV and camper storage lot, also dot the corridor. Destinations are spread out, requiring a car to visit. Just south of the Wrentham border on Route 1 in Plainville is a strip shopping mall with a Stop & Shop, Target, TJ Maxx, and other large chains, and just north is a similar strip shopping mall with a Trader Joe's and Bass Pro Shops. However, within Wrentham, most non-residential uses are owned by small businesses rather than national chains.

Route 1 was recently rezoned, as is explained in the Introduction, to improve the aesthetics of the corridor and more fully leverage the visibility on a high-traffic route. The rezoning is intended to attract office, entertainment, and retail development along the southern portion of Route 1. Along the portion north of Thurston Street, the rezoning is intended to protect water supply and recreational resources at the Foxborough State Forest, while also encouraging limited office development. A 2018 study of the corridor also recommends transportation and landscaping improvements to accommodate increased traffic, improve stormwater management, and create a more cohesive and attractive corridor.

Route 140

Route 140, also known as Franklin Street, runs east/west through town and becomes East Street at the central intersection with South Street in the Downtown. Near the western border, there is a concentration of commercial and industrial uses, adjacent to the new Eagle Brook residential development. The uses are mostly industry-oriented services, including truck services and janitorial services, serving a select clientele from across the region. Although the area is walkable from the Eagle Brook neighborhood, the non-residential uses do not provide everyday needs for the nearby residents. Just west of the Wrentham border on Route 140 in Franklin is more retail, including a strip shopping mall with a Big Lots and Shaw's grocery store.

Nearby Commercial Districts

As noted above, there are commercial districts with national chain retailers just outside of Wrentham to the north in Foxborough, south in Plainville, and west in Franklin. Focus groups with Wrentham residents indicated that residents leave town to do their grocery shopping at Shaw's, Big Y, Trader Joe's, or Stop and Shop, as Wrentham does not have a grocery store. Residents also buy other goods, such as clothes, at stores outside of Wrentham such as TJ Maxx and Target, rather than at the Premium Outlets. Further consumer research could help elucidate why residents shop elsewhere—one reason may be that one-stop shops such as Target are more convenient for everyday goods than the Premium Outlets.

Industrial Areas & Quarries

Industrial uses are shown in light purple in Figure ED-8. A few of the industrial areas are vacant, such as the former Crosby Valve/Tyco/FRM site on the west side of the Downtown, the area in the north west corner of Town, as well as most of the area on the east side of Route 1. However, there are two large and active quarries in Wrentham: one just south of the Premium Outlets and the other southwest of Lake Pearl.

Farms and Farm stands

Wrentham also has a handful of farms that not only offer fresh produce but serve as a destination for recreation and tourism. The Big Apple Farm offers apple picking and a robust farm shop; Cook's Valley Farm offers fresh produce at their farm stand; and White Barn Farm on Route 1A just south of the Downtown offers produce at their roadside farm stand. Agriculture is critical to Wrentham's heritage and offers potential for town branding and tourism.



Municipal Budget

Tax rates

The tax rates in Wrentham and neighboring towns are given in Table ED-5. Wrentham has the lowest residential tax rate, and the second to lowest commercial and industrial property tax rates.

Table ED-5. Tax Rates by Class, Fiscal Year 2021

Municipality	Residential	Commercial	Industrial
Bellingham	14.41	20.58	20.58
Foxborough	14.74	18.73	18.73
Franklin	14.65	14.65	14.65
Norfolk	17.99	17.99	17.99
Plainville	14.70	17.75	17.75
Wrentham	14.07	17.42	17.42

Source: MA Department of Revenue

The average single family tax bill is \$6,743. Although this is higher than the average bill in Bellingham, Franklin, or Plainville, the median income in Wrentham is higher than in those towns. When accounting for the median income, Wrentham's average tax bill as a percentage of income is 12.26%, lower than any other neighboring towns. Norfolk's average tax bill as a percentage of income is the highest at 17.78%.¹⁷

The total assessed value in Wrentham is approximately \$2.5 billion. As shown in Table ED-6, 80% of Wrentham's assessed value is comprised of residential property and 20% of commercial, industrial, and personal property, similar to the percentages in Foxborough and Franklin.¹⁸ Bellingham and Plainville have a higher portion of commercial, industrial, and personal property value and Norfolk has a lower.

When accounting for the population of each Town, Wrentham has the highest assessed value per capita at \$211,156. In other words, Wrentham has the largest tax base, considering its population. However, Wrentham also has the lowest population density out of the neighboring towns. Therefore, infrastructure and services are spread out over a larger area of land, which may increase costs.

¹⁷ MA Department of Revenue, 2020 <<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/municipal-finance-trend-dashboard>>

¹⁸ Personal property generally includes tangible items that are not firmly attached to land or buildings and are not considered to be part of the real estate, for example, merchandise, furniture, machinery, tools, animals and equipment.

Table ED-6. Assessed Values by Class, Fiscal Year 2021

Municipality	Assessed Value, in billions					RO** % of Total	CIP*** % of Total	Land Value per Capita	Population Density (per square mile)
	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property*	Total				
Bellingham	\$2.03	\$0.29	\$0.27	\$0.29	\$2.88	71%	29%	\$169,321	558
Foxborough	\$2.70	\$0.56	\$0.07	\$0.12	\$3.45	78%	22%	\$195,782	844
Franklin	\$4.68	\$0.39	\$0.52	\$0.19	\$5.77	81%	19%	\$169,393	1,261
Norfolk	\$1.83	\$0.08	\$0.02	\$0.05	\$1.98	93%	7%	\$168,478	773
Plainville	\$1.15	\$0.30	\$0.07	\$0.09	\$1.61	71%	29%	\$176,884	788
Wrentham	\$1.98	\$0.37	\$0.05	\$0.08	\$2.48	80%	20%	\$211,156	512

Source: MA Department of Revenue

Notes:

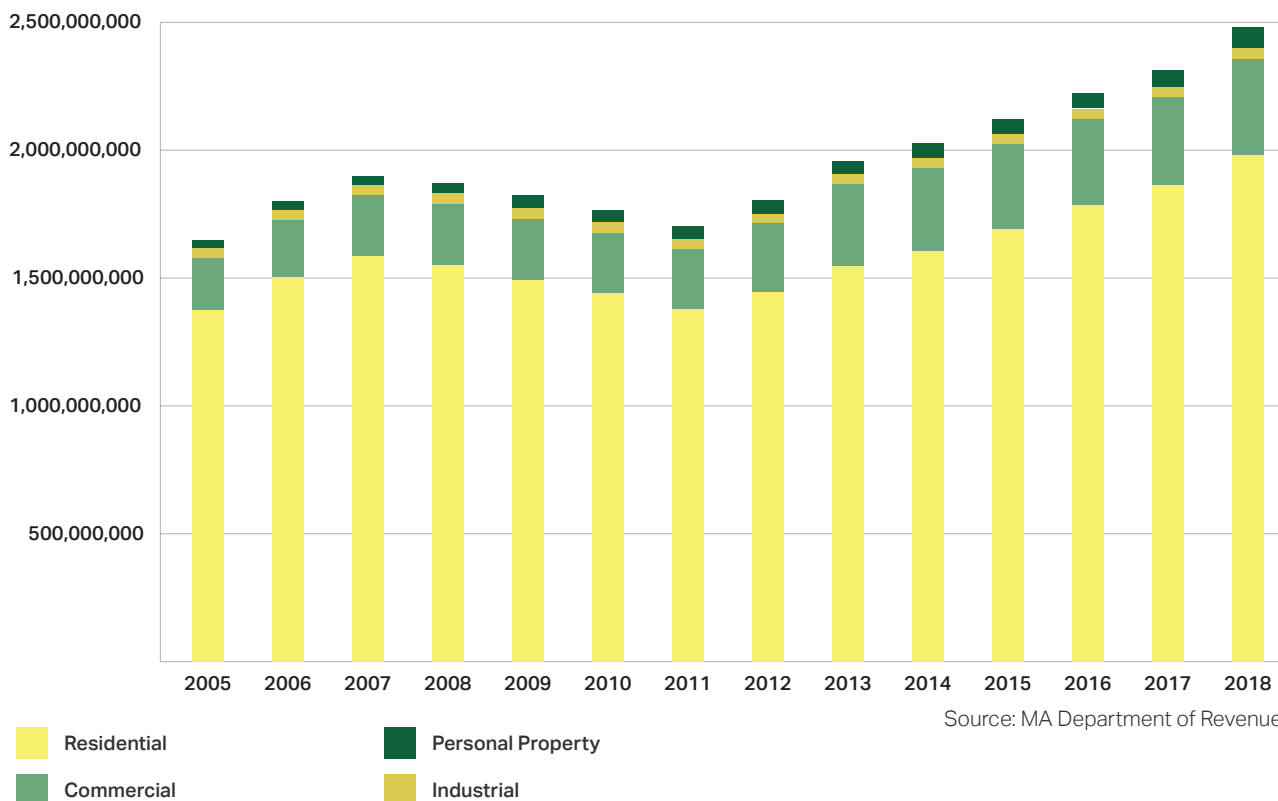
* Personal property generally includes tangible items that are not firmly attached to land or buildings and are not considered to be part of the real estate, for example, merchandise, furniture, machinery, tools, animals, and equipment.

** "RO" indicates Residential and Open Space. The assessed value of Open Space property is marginal.

*** "CIP" indicates Commercial, Industrial, and Personal Property

Wrentham's total assessed value has increased over time, and notably, the percentage from residential property has decreased from 83% in fiscal year 2005 to just under 80 percent in 2021. Figure ED-9 shows the assessed value by class in Wrentham from fiscal year 2005-2021.

Figure ED-9. Assessed Value by Class in Wrentham Fiscal Year 2005-2021



The Outlets account for almost 10% of Wrentham's assessed property value. The second largest taxpayer accounts for only 1% of the property tax base, therefore the Outlets have an enormous role in the fiscal health of Wrentham. Table ED-7 below lists the largest taxpayers in fiscal year 2020, demonstrating the critical enormous role that the Outlets play in the fiscal health of Wrentham.

Table ED-7: Largest taxpayers, FY 2020

Name	Nature of business	Total assessed value	Amount of tax	% of Wrentham's total property tax value
Premium Outlet Partner LP	Outlet mall	\$224,000,000	\$4,000,000	9.7%
Massachusetts Electric	Utility	\$20,000,000	\$350,000	0.9%
DRI/Maple Ledgeview Wrentham	Retail	\$19,000,000	\$250,000	0.8%
The Shops at Wrentham, LLC	Retail	\$10,000,000	\$200,000	0.4%
Pond Home Community Inc	Assisted living	\$9,000,000	\$150,000	0.4%
Verizon new England Inc	Utility	\$8,000,000	\$150,000	0.3%
Bay State Gas Company	Utility	\$8,000,000	\$150,000	0.3%
Capstan Holdings I LLC	Manufacturing	\$7,000,000	\$150,000	0.3%
Maples Rehab & Nurs Ctr LLC	Nursing home	\$7,000,000	\$150,000	0.3%
Algonquin Gas Transmission	Utility	\$6,000,000	\$100,000	0.3%

Source: Town of Wrentham Annual Report, 2020

Community feedback

Based on the town-wide survey conducted in Fall 2020, focus groups conducted in January 2021, and meetings with the Wrentham Economic Development Commission in February 2021, the following additional strengths, challenges, and opportunities related to economic development were identified.

Strength	Challenge	Opportunity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good for families with strong schools and education • Open space, natural resources, and farmland, suggesting potential to promote Wrentham's natural resources for tourism • According to the town-wide survey, Downtown and the Town Common is the most "meaningful place" to Wrentham residents • Walkable Downtown with local businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance from higher-paying jobs resulting in long commutes • Residents leave Wrentham to grocery shop, buy clothes, and run other errands at markets and retail options that don't exist in Wrentham. However, demand to locate similar commercial options in Wrentham is low, because the shops and amenities are nearby in Plainville, Franklin, and Foxborough, just beyond the Wrentham border. • Lack of diversity in restaurant options • Increase in on-line shopping, especially during COVID • Lack of communication between Downtown businesses and the Town • Lack of coordination between Downtown businesses and Wrentham businesses generally • Love for Wrentham's "small-town feel" fuels opposition to new development • Developers are hesitant to build along Route 1 in Wrentham given the uncertainty of community opposition • Burdensome fees and taxes • Reputation as being unfriendly to business • Long and uncertain development and permitting process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Premium Outlets are not considered one of the "most important strengths" of Wrentham, suggesting potential to better serve local residents • Two of the "most important improvements" to residents is to support "more shops and services Downtown" and "more trails and parks" • Given the choice of where to locate new growth if it were to occur, respondents to the town-wide survey preferred new growth to be located Downtown and along Route 1 rather than near the Premium Outlets, Sheldonville, Wampum Corner, or the Wrentham Developmental Center • Residents would like to support more locally-owned businesses • Town Common is potential gathering space but can feel run-down • Desire for more community events

Existing Conditions Assessment:

Housing

The following section presents the demographics of households, the housing stock, and housing costs in Wrentham, followed by a discussion of housing needs, opportunities, and constraints, as well as potential municipal tools to advance housing locally. All of this information should be understood within the context of feedback from the community.

Given that the findings for the 2020 Census have not yet been released, the most recent source of data available is the US Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Averages. The ACS is an ongoing survey that provides data every year. Unlike the Census, the ACS surveys only a sample of the population. The 5-year estimates are “period” estimates that represent data collected over a period of time, thus increasing the statistical reliability of the annual surveys. Most of the data is from the most recent ACS 5-year average from 2012 to 2018, summarized below as the year 2016. Therefore, more recent developments, such as Ledgeview/The Point, and the residents who live in them are not included in most of the summary statistics.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching impacts on our society, including tragic loss of life, stressed mental health, compromised public education, and a struggling economy. Given this, it is reasonable to assume that the pandemic will have some kind of influence on the housing market. There is a great amount of speculation about what impacts will unfold in 2021 and in future years. However, it is too early to make accurate projections for Wrentham. Based on historical trends and economic theory, housing demand remains high in strong jobs markets. Although there has been an increase in remote work, the job and housing market in the Boston metropolitan area remains strong with continued investment and development. Therefore, it is assumed that Wrentham’s recent housing trends will continue.



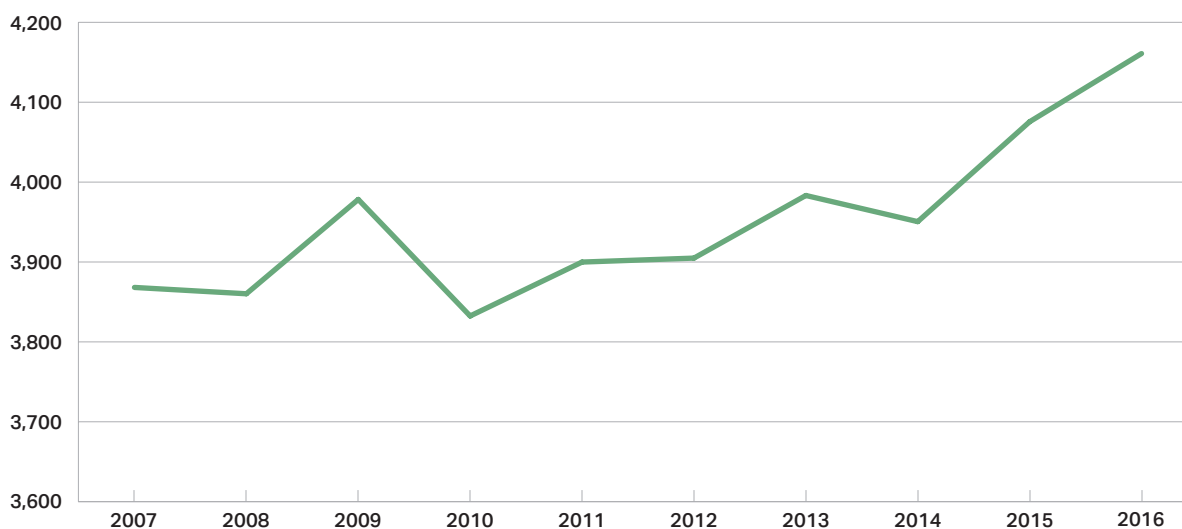
Source: Diane Glass

Households

Number of households

While analyzing the Wrentham population is important for gaining a better understanding of the overall conditions in Town, analyzing households is helpful when considering the housing conditions, including the demand for and preferences for different types of housing. There are 4,162 households in Wrentham.²⁰ Households may be families of related individuals, or non-families with unrelated individuals living in the same housing unit. As shown in Figure H-1, the number of households has grown by 8% over 10 years, adding 295 households.

Figure H-1. # of Households, 2007-2016



Source: ACS 5-Year Averages

MAPC prepared population projections through 2030 for the Metro Boston region under two scenarios: Status Quo, based on the continuation of existing rates of births, deaths, migration, and housing occupancy; and a Stronger Region that assumes higher population growth, greater housing demand, and a larger workforce. The total number of households in Wrentham has already exceeded the projections for the Stronger Region scenario, which had estimated 3,950 households in Wrentham in 2020 and 4,142 in 2030.²¹

As of the most recent data, there are an average of 2.75 people per housing unit in Wrentham, thus household size has already gotten smaller. The household size is similar to that of neighboring towns which range from 2.54 in Plainville to 2.99 in Norfolk. The average household size for owner-occupied homes is close to three people per home, compared to a little less than two people per home in renter-occupied homes. The average household size is also larger for owner-occupied homes than renter-occupied in neighboring towns, also.²²

²⁰ ACS 5-Year Averages, 2014-2018

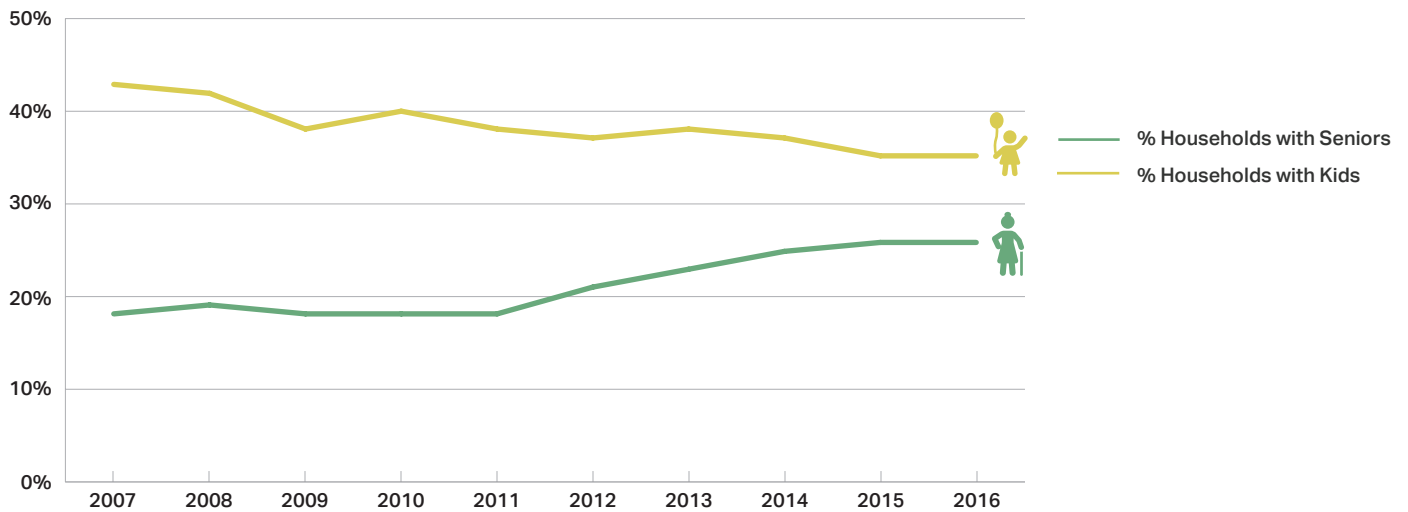
²¹ MAPC MetroFuture Projections, 2016

²² ACS 5-Year Averages, 2014-2018

Households with children and seniors

As shown in Figure H-2, 1,439 households in Wrentham, 35% of the total, have children. This is similar to neighboring towns which range from 31% in Foxborough to 41% in Norfolk. However, the proportion of households with children has been decreasing in Wrentham, consistent with the population getting older in age. Fewer households, 1,065 in total or 26%, are occupied by people over the age of 65. Of these households, 444 are occupied by seniors living alone. The percentage of households with a senior has increased from 18% on average between 2005-2009 to 26% on average from 2014-2018.²⁵

Figure H-2. % Households with Children or Seniors



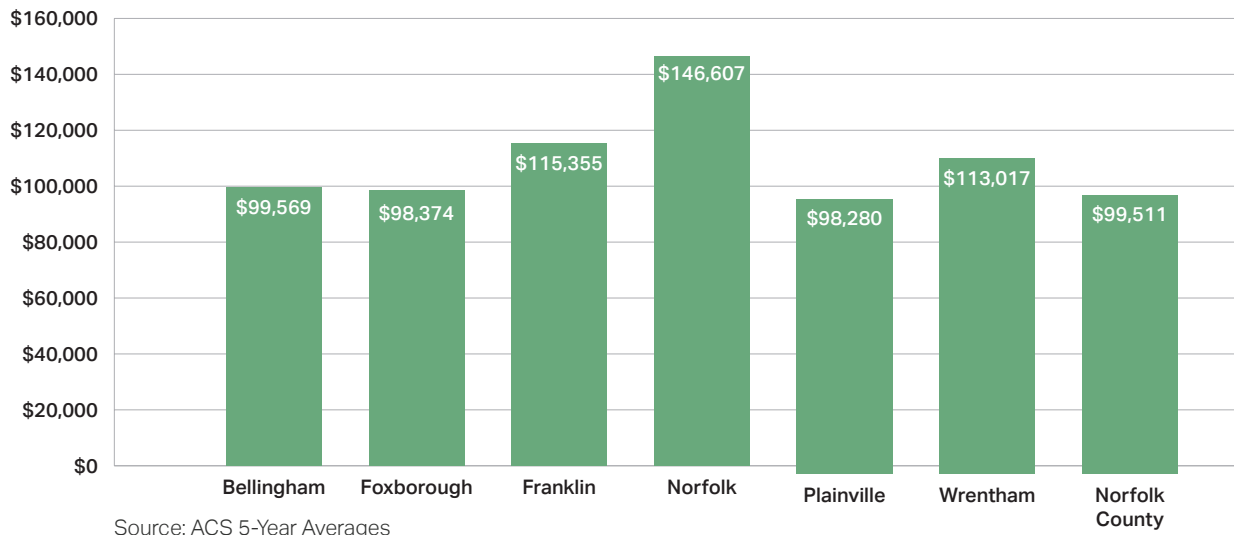
Source: ACS 5-Year Averages

23 ACS 5-Year Averages, 2014-2018

Household income

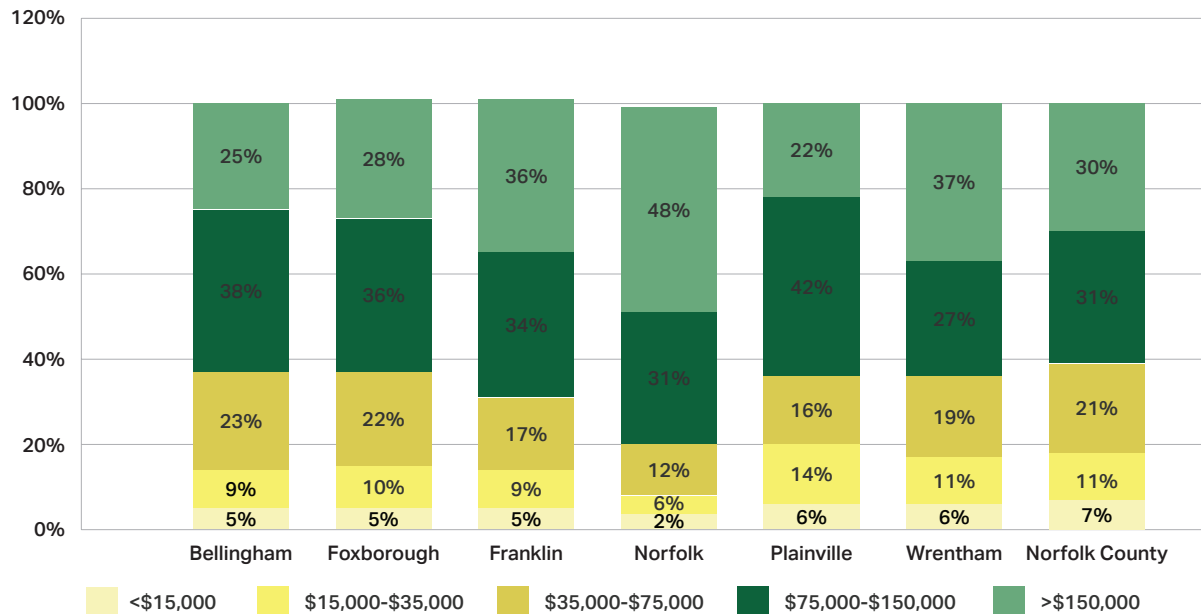
Wrentham’s median household income is \$113,017, higher than Bellingham, Foxborough, and Plainville, while lower than Franklin and Norfolk, as shown in Figure H-3. The median household income has increased by \$19,000 or 21% over the previous 10 years, similar to the increase in Norfolk County generally.

Figure H-3. Median Household Income, 2016



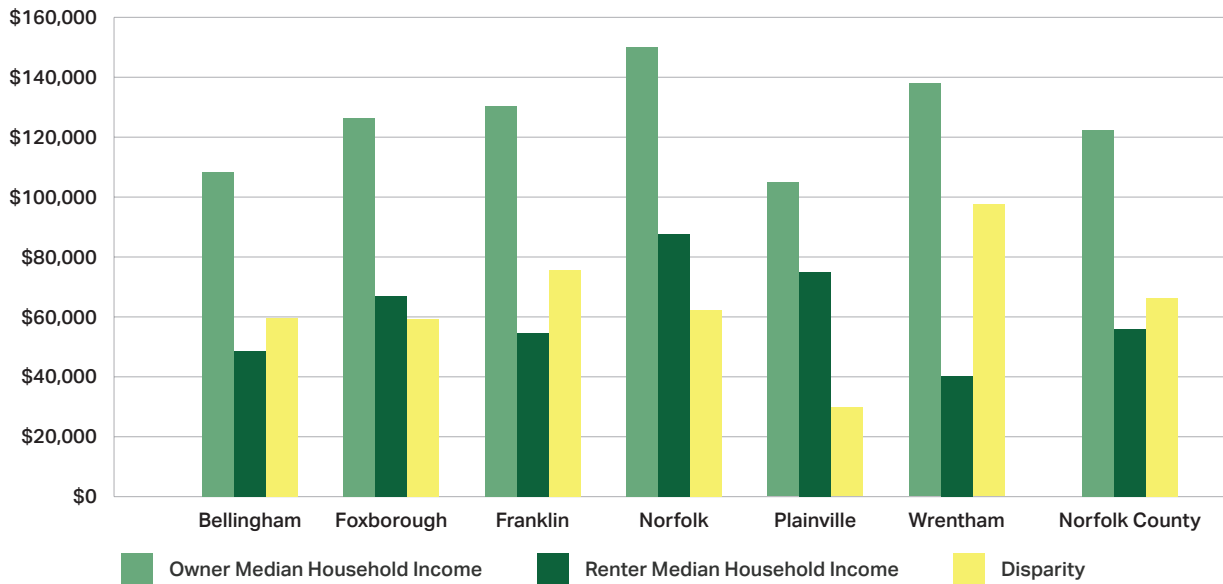
Notably, Wrentham has the smallest percentage of middle-income households: only 27% of households earn between \$75,000 to \$150,000, compared to 42% in Plainville and 31% in Norfolk. Figure H-4 compares the range of incomes between towns, demonstrating the relatively small portion of middle-income households in Wrentham.

Figure H-4. Household Income Inequality, 2016

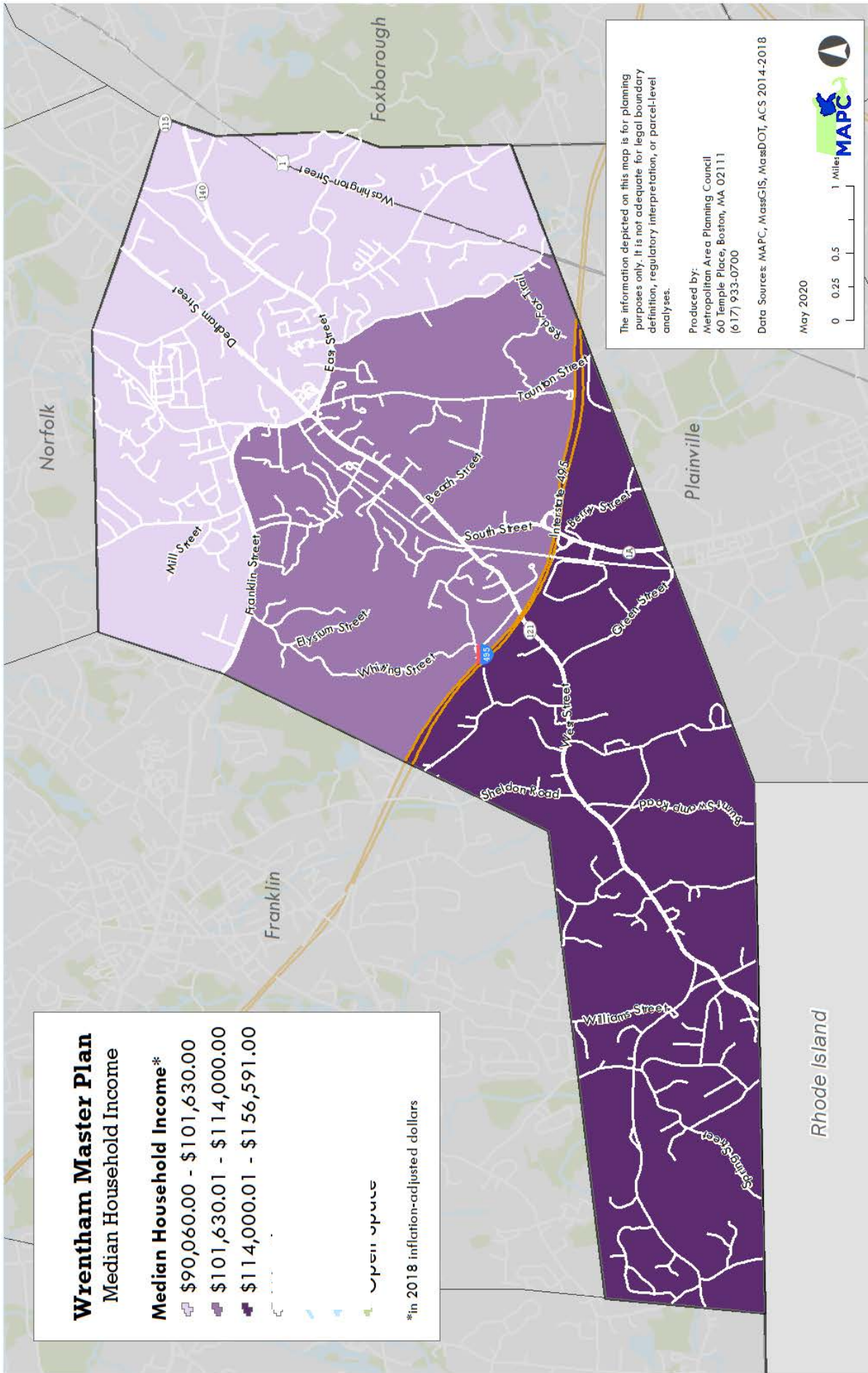


The income disparity between renters and homeowners is even more dramatic. On average, homeowners in Wrentham make \$137,768 while renters make \$40,260, a difference of \$97,508 annually. The disparity between homeowner and renter incomes in Wrentham is substantially greater than in other towns, as shown in Figure H-5.²⁴

Figure H-5. Disparity between Homeowner and Renter Median Household Income, 2016



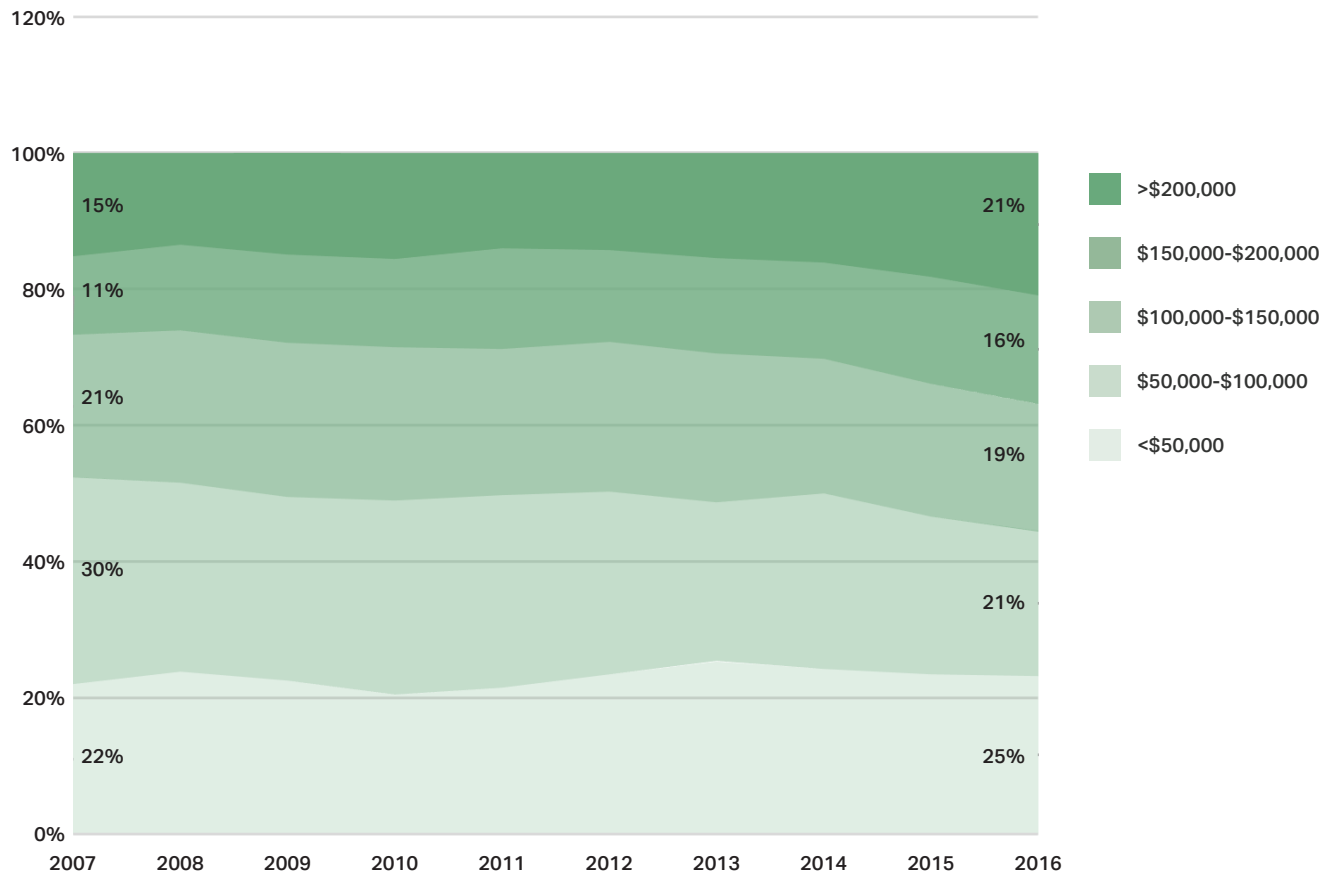
There are also difference in household income across different neighborhoods in Wrentham. Median household income is lower in the northern portions of town and higher in the southern portions, as shown on the Median Household Income map.



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Figure H-6 shows the change in household income over time. The percentage of households making more than \$150,000 over the 10 years between 2007 and 2016 has increased from 26% to 37%. During the same time, the percentage of households making between \$50,000 - \$150,000 decreased from 51% of the total number of households to 40%, and the number of households making less than \$50,000 stayed roughly the same. The data does not track individual households over time, so we cannot definitively determine the cause of this trend. It may have been caused by an increase in earnings by what used to be middle-income households, or it may have been caused by an influx of new, higher-income households and outflux of middle-income households. Nonetheless, Wrentham's middle class has been shrinking in the past 10 years.²⁵

Figure H-6. Household income, 2007-2016



Source ACS 5-Year Averages

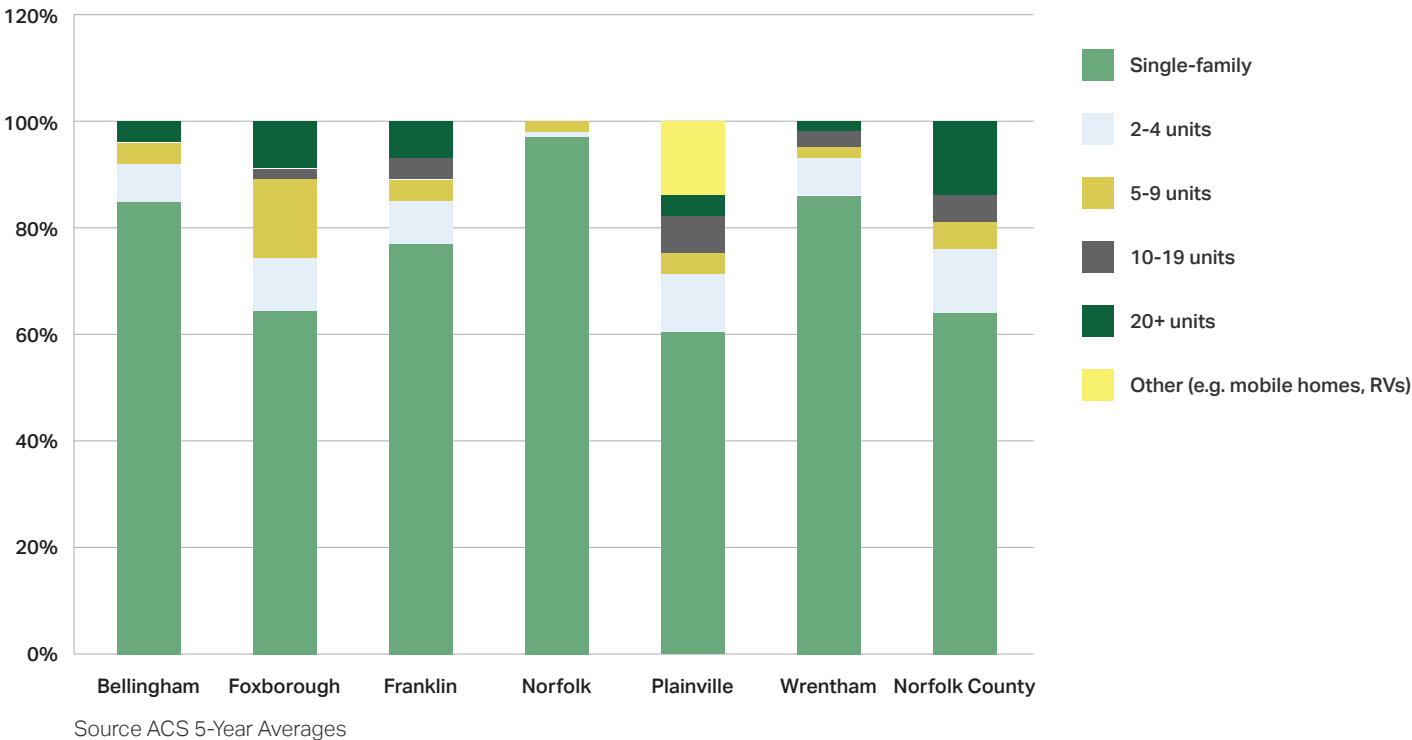
25 ACS 5-Year Averages

Housing stock

Housing types, size, and age

There are 4,240 housing units in Wrentham, most of which are single-family homes—86% are single-family including 79% detached and 8% attached single-family (also known as townhomes). As shown in Figure H-7, only Norfolk has a higher percentage of single-family homes. The housing stock of Franklin, which has a similar median household income to Wrentham, is 77% single-family and has a far greater proportion of multifamily housing structures with 20 or greater units. Recent developments in Wrentham, including Ledgeview/The Point may change these proportions. Similar to other municipalities, housing in Wrentham was mostly built between 1980 and 1999—34% of the housing is from this era.

Figure H-7. Housing Types



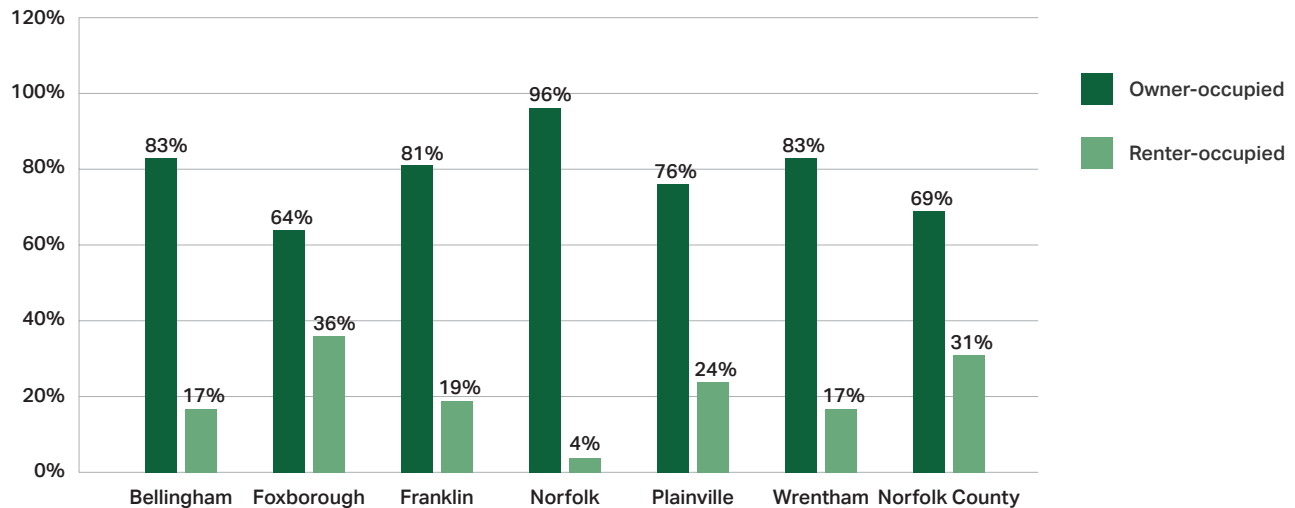
Between 50% and 90% of the housing has three bedrooms or greater, similar to Bellingham and Franklin. There are few housing options with fewer bedrooms, therefore the margin of error in the data is large. Between 4% and 8% of homes are one-bedroom and between 18% and 24% are two-bedroom.²⁶

Wrentham has a very low vacancy rate. Of the 4,240 housing units in Wrentham, 98% are occupied. This suggests a relatively low supply and high demand of housing. A low vacancy rate can result in an increase in prices and limit the ability of residents to find a home that best meets their needs.

26 ACS 5-Year Averages, 2014-2018

The majority of the housing is owner-occupied, although 17%, almost one in five homes, are renter-occupied. In other words, 83% of households own their homes and 17% rent their homes. This is a similar proportion to Bellingham and Franklin. In comparison, 4% of housing units are renter-occupied in Norfolk and 36% in Foxborough, as shown in Figure H-8. This proportion of renters is not new--approximately 15% of the households in Wrentham have been renter-occupied for the past 10 years.²⁷

Figure H-8. % Homes owned & rented



Source: ACS 5-Year Average

27 ACS 5-Year Averages, 2005-2009 through 2014-2018

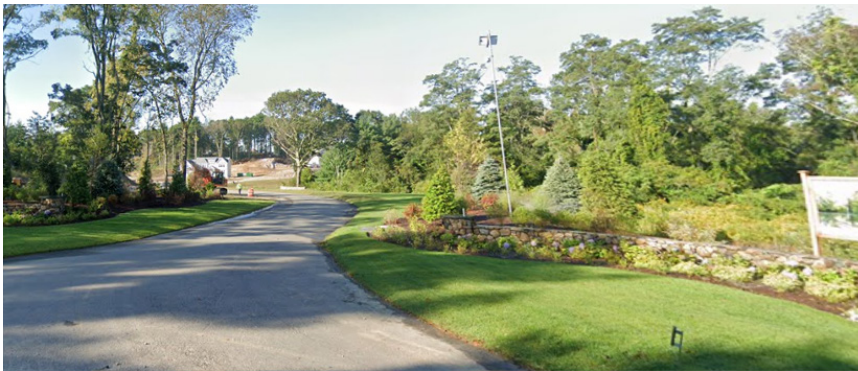
Recent residential development

In addition to the housing described above, there have been a few major residential developments in recent years, as summarized below. These developments add variety to the housing stock, offering both single-family and multifamily units at both market-rate costs and deed-restricted Affordable levels for rent and ownership.

- **Ledgeview/The Point:** 238 luxury apartment bedrooms for residents aged 55 years and older, as well as assisted living, Marriott Hotels, and commercial uses located at the intersection of I-495 and Route 1.



- **Park Street:** 92 lots on 112 acres, Open Space Residential Preservation subdivision



- **Eagle Brook Commons:** 100-unit rental development

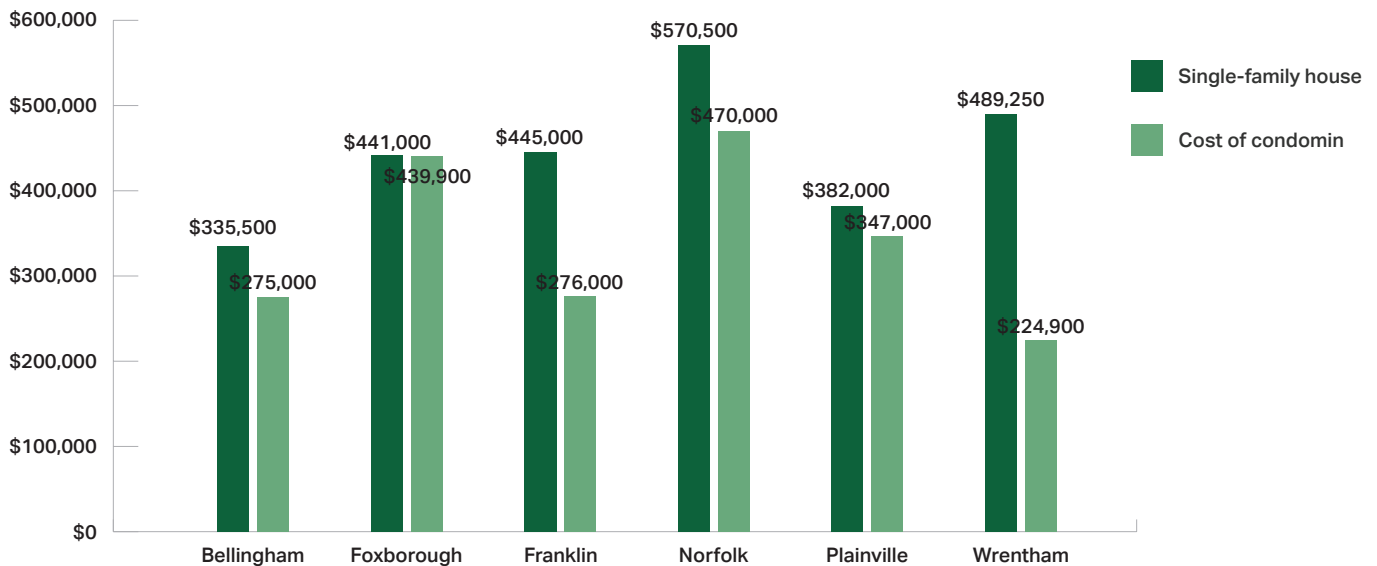


Housing costs

Median cost of a home

The median cost of a single-family house in Wrentham is \$489,250, similar to the cost in Foxborough and Franklin. The median cost of a condominium is substantially less at \$224,900. The difference between the cost of a single-family house and a condominium is greater in Wrentham than in any of the adjacent towns. Figure H-9 shows the median cost of a single-family home and a condominium in Wrentham and neighboring towns.²⁸

Figure H-9. Cost of single-family house vs. condo, 2019



Source: Warren Group

There are several ways to measure the cost of rent. According to the apartments currently on the market, the median rent in Wrentham is \$2,207.²⁹ In contrast, the median contracted rent, which includes the cost of leases that have not been updated in years, is lower. The most recent data on contracted rent is from 2016 with a median of \$1,042, similar to Bellingham's and lower than the rent in most neighboring towns.³⁰

28 Warren Group, 2018. Median cost is based on annual home sales.

29 Based on listings on Craigslist in the 4th quarter of 2020, including one 1-bedroom, four 2-bedroom, and one 3-bedroom apartments.

30 ACS 5-Year Averages, 2014-2018. Does not include utilities or fuel cost. Data on contracted rents from 2019 is not yet available. The most recent data on contracted rent is an average of the five years between 2014-2018, identified here as the median rent in 2016.

Change in costs over time

Over the past two decades, the median price of a single-family home (including condominiums and single-family houses) in Wrentham has increased by an average annual change of 1%. In real dollars, the median cost of buying a home increased from \$304,000 in 2000 to \$489,250 in 2019. However, the value of the dollar has also changed over that time due to inflation. When accounting for inflation, the cost of a home in Wrentham has increased little. In 2019 dollars, the cost of a single-family home was \$465,408 in 2000 and now is \$489,250.

In comparison, the median cost of renting has increased much more than the increase in buying a single-family house or a condominium. Table H-1 shows the median cost of renting an apartment, buying a single-family house, and buying a condominium from 2015-2019 in Wrentham in 2019 dollars.³¹ Rent has increased annually by 18% on average, while the cost of buying home has increased between 2-5%.

Table H-1. Change in cost of a Home in Wrentham, 2015-2019 in 2019 Dollars

	Median rent	Median cost of single-family house	Median cost of condominium
2015	\$1,478	\$446,727	\$191,611
2016	\$1,414	\$474,475	\$239,004
2017	\$1,789	\$450,518	\$207,891
2018	\$1,478	\$468,784	\$244,583
2019	\$2,490	\$489,250	\$224,900
Average Annual % Change	18%	2%	5%

Source: Warren Group, Craigslist, US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Notes: Median rent based on 4th quarter listings on Craigslist

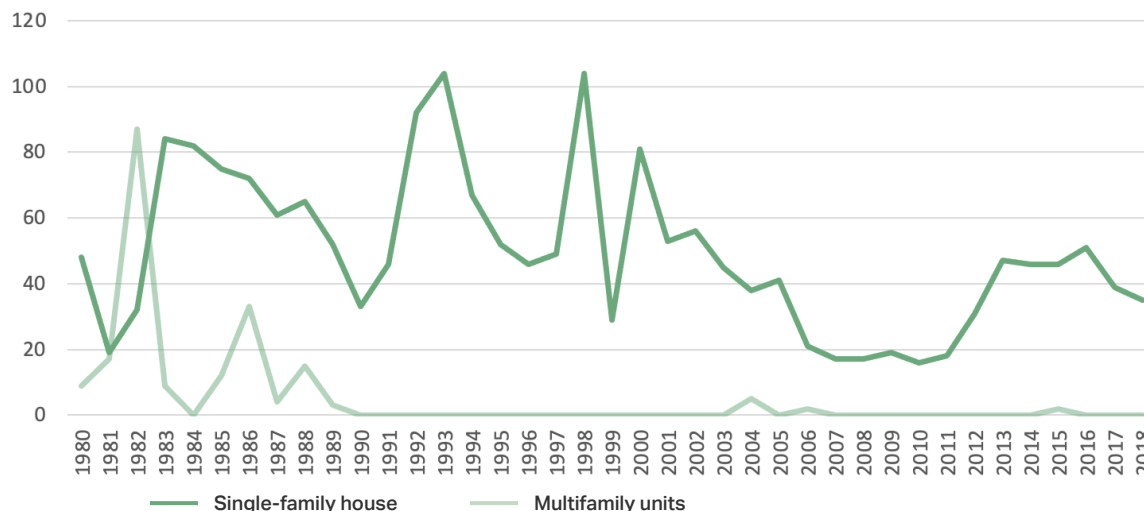
Residential development

Another important aspect of the housing market is the production of new housing units. Regionally, production of housing units has not kept pace with demand for housing units. This combination of decreasing supply and increasing demand has contributed to rising housing costs and continues to have a direct negative impact on housing affordability. In Wrentham, the rate of residential development has also been slowing. Figure H-10 shows the number of building permits for single-family and multifamily units from 1980-2019. In particular, almost no multifamily units were built during the 18 years between 1990 and 2018.³²

31 ACS 5-Year Averages 2005-2009 through 2014-2018; Warren Group; US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Data on cost of buying a single-family house or condominium in 2020 is not yet available.

32 Census Building Permit Survey, 1980-2018

Figure H-10. Building permits, single-family & multifamily units, 1980-2018



Source: Census Building Permit Survey

Wrentham has added approximately 730 new housing units since 2000 and 371 since 2010.³³ In comparison to adjacent towns, the pace of residential development in recent years between 2007-2016 has been similar to that in Franklin; Norfolk, Bellingham, and Plainville have seen a higher rate of residential development. Foxborough has seen a relatively lower rate, although more recent building permit data indicates that there was a very large amount of new housing units permitted in Foxborough in 2017.³⁴

Affordable Housing

When most people talk about housing affordability, they simply mean housing that works within their budget. However, “Affordable Housing”—distinguished in this plan with capitalized letters—refers to a more specific type of housing. Affordable Housing refers to housing that is deed restricted to cost no more than 30% of income for households meeting specific income thresholds. In other words, the cost of the housing is relative to the residents’ income is preserved, regardless of whether market-rate housing costs increase or decrease over the years. These restrictions ensure that income-eligible households can stay in their communities without having to make difficult financial decisions, such as skipping meals or doctor’s appointments, to have enough money to pay for their homes.

Typically, “Affordable Housing” is reserved for households at or below 80% of the area median income (AMI), but it can be reserved for those with lower incomes or higher incomes. The AMI is a measure set by the federal government based on income and household size. In the Boston area, including Wrentham, the 2020 AMI is \$119,000.³⁵ This means that a family of two earning \$77,000 or a family of four earning \$96,250 are eligible for Affordable Housing in Wrentham.

One tool to measure and help produce Affordable Housing is “Chapter 40B” or the Massachusetts’ Comprehensive Permit law, enacted in 1969. Chapter 40B is a state statute that encourages cities and towns to maintain a supply of Affordable Housing. Under Chapter 40B, at least 10% of every

³³ ACS 5-Year Average 2014-2018; US Census, 2000, 2010

³⁴ Census Building Permit Survey

³⁵ MA Department of Housing and Community Development

municipality’s housing stock must be listed on the Massachusetts Subsidized Housing Inventory. The Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) includes housing that is deed restricted to be affordable to eligible low- and moderate-income residents without paying more than 30% of their annual household income, as well as market-rate units in mixed-income rental housing developments where 20-25% of units are Affordable Housing. This means the Subsidized Housing Inventory is typically an overestimation of each municipality’s Affordable Housing supply.

In communities where less than 10% of housing units are included on the Subsidized Housing Inventory, developers may petition the local Zoning Boards of Appeals (ZBA) for a comprehensive permit for housing developments that do not fully comply with local zoning, provided at least 20-25% of homes in the development are Affordable Housing. Under Chapter 40B, the ZBA has limited grounds for refusal in this case. Communities that are above 10% on the SHI may claim “safe harbor” and thereby deny a developer a comprehensive permit.

A municipality’s Subsidized Housing Inventory fluctuates with new development of both Affordable and market rate housing. As more market rate housing is built, or if Affordable units are lost, more Affordable units must be produced to reach, maintain, or exceed the 10% threshold.

Out of 3,821 housing units, 485 or 12.69% are counted in the Subsidized Housing Inventory, narrowly exceeding the 10% goal.^{36,37} However, it is also important to highlight that all new units developed between 2010 and 2020 will be added to the year-round housing unit total as of the 2020 decennial census and may change the percentage of housing units counted on the Subsidized Housing Inventory.

Municipal tax rate

Another component of housing affordability is the annual cost of municipal property taxes. The proposed residential tax rate for the 2021 Fiscal Year is \$14.07 per \$1,000 of assessed value, a decrease from 2020 and the lowest rate since 2012.³⁸ Based on a median home value of \$434,900 on average between 2014–2018, the average single family home tax bill for 2021 would be approximately \$6,500. The property tax rates of neighboring towns are shown in Table H-2. Wrentham’s tax rate is lower than that of all neighboring towns.

Table H-2: Residential tax rates, FY 2021

Municipality	Tax rate per \$1,000 assessed value
Bellingham	14.41
Foxborough	14.74
Franklin	14.65
Norfolk	17.99
Plainville	14.70
Wrentham	14.07

Source: MA Department of Revenue

36 For the purposes of the formal SHI, the number of total housing units in Wrentham is based on 2010 Census, and the number of affordable units is based on DHCD’s most recent update in September 2017.

37 DHCD, Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), 2017

38 Wrentham’s annual tax rate is unavailable before 2012.

Housing needs

Comparing Wrentham's households to its housing can help elucidate how people's housing needs are being met and where there might be gaps in affordability and housing types and locations.

Affordability

The cost of housing is relative to the household and can be analyzed in a number of ways. One way to assess affordability is cost-burden. A household is considered cost-burdened if more than 30% of household income is spent on housing. Approximately 27% of households are cost-burdened, a reduction from 32% in 2007.³⁹ The actual number of cost-burdened households has also decreased from 1,216 in 2007 to 1,119 households in 2016. However, all of that benefit has been gained by homeowners. During the same time period, the number of cost-burdened renters has increased from 237 to 364 households resulting in more than half of renters being cost-burdened in 2017.



About 2 out of 10 homeowners are cost-burdened (spend more than 30% of income on housing)



About 6 out of 10 renters are cost-burdened

Another way is to consider the gap between median household income and median home price. Wrentham's median income is relatively high, thus the average Wrentham household that currently lives in Wrentham could still likely afford to move into the average Wrentham home. More specifically, a household earning Wrentham's median income of \$113,017⁴⁰ would be able to afford a house costing approximately \$540,000, assuming good credit, reasonable level of debt, and a down payment of 20% of the cost of the average Wrentham home.⁴¹ Therefore, the average Wrentham family could afford the average home in Wrentham. Similarly, the median household would be able to easily afford the median monthly rental rate for a two-bedroom.

Of course, this calculation is a generalization, and does not give a complete picture of need. For example, it also does not take into account the people who would like to live in Wrentham but have not moved to Town because of the relatively high cost of housing. For example, the median income in Plainville in 2016 was \$98,280. Using the same assumptions, the average Plainville household would not be able to afford the average home in Wrentham. Thus, the housing costs are likely excluding households with lower and middle incomes.

39 ACS, 5-Year Survey 2005-2009 through 2014-2018

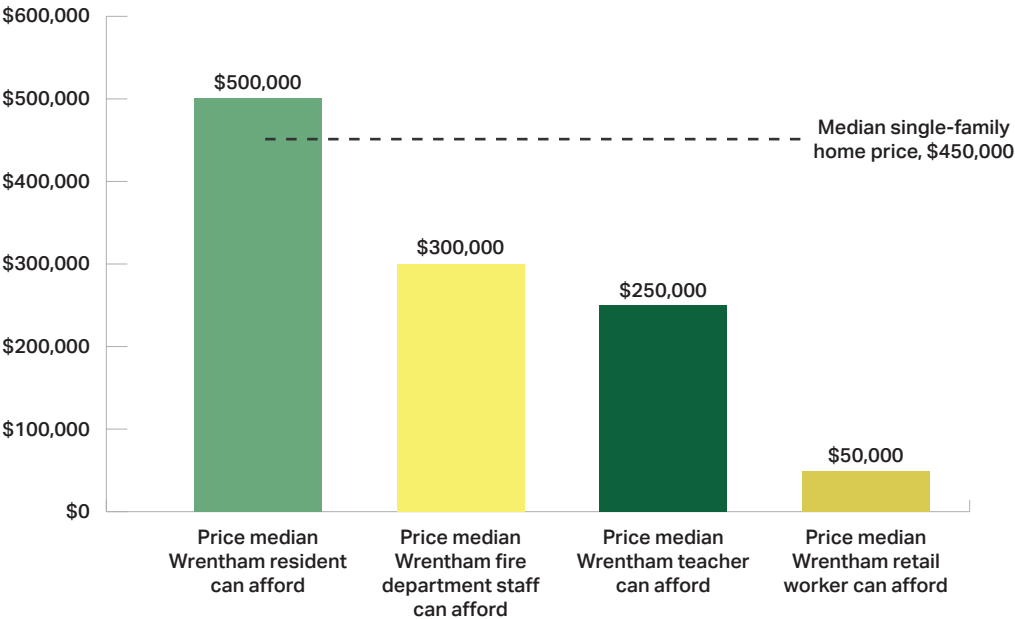
40 Due to data availability, the affordability gap calculation is based on 2016 median income and housing costs.

41 This calculation was performed using the Zillow Affordability Calculator with the following assumptions: \$500 monthly debts, \$87,945 down payment, 4% interest rate, 30-year mortgage, 1.4% property tax, \$1,000 annual home insurance.

Importantly, it also does not account for the people who work in Wrentham, who maintain its economy, but cannot afford to live here. As discussed in further detail in the Economic Development chapter, most people who work in Wrentham work in retail, education, or accommodation and food services. These three sectors account for 68% of the employees in Wrentham. The median income of someone who works in retail makes \$21,000 in their job in Wrentham. Similarly, an employee working in education makes \$26,000 and an employee working in accommodation and food services makes \$19,000. Unless these workers have 2nd or 3rd jobs or live with other earners in their household, these workers likely cannot afford the median home price. Based on the assumptions used above, the average employee in Wrentham would be able to afford a \$50,000 single-family home.

Similarly, the people who contribute to the civic society of Wrentham also cannot afford to live here. The chart below illustrates this mismatch in Wrentham. Based on standard housing financing assumptions, the average teacher who teaches in Wrentham schools cannot afford to buy a house here, as a single earner. Similarly, the average staff of the Wrentham fire department cannot afford to buy a house here without additional income from another earner in the household or another job. This mismatch makes it harder to attract high-quality teachers and Town employees, weakens community bonds, and contributes to traffic and congestion because residents spend time on the roads commuting out of town and workers spend time on the roads commuting in. If there was a greater match between the cost of housing and the wages for jobs in Wrentham, the people who work here could also live here. Figure H-11 shows the median single-family home price in Wrentham compared to what the median resident, the Wrentham fire department staff, Wrentham teacher, and Wrentham retail employee could afford.⁴²

Figure H-11. Mismatch between Wrentham Town Employee Salaries and Cost of Housing

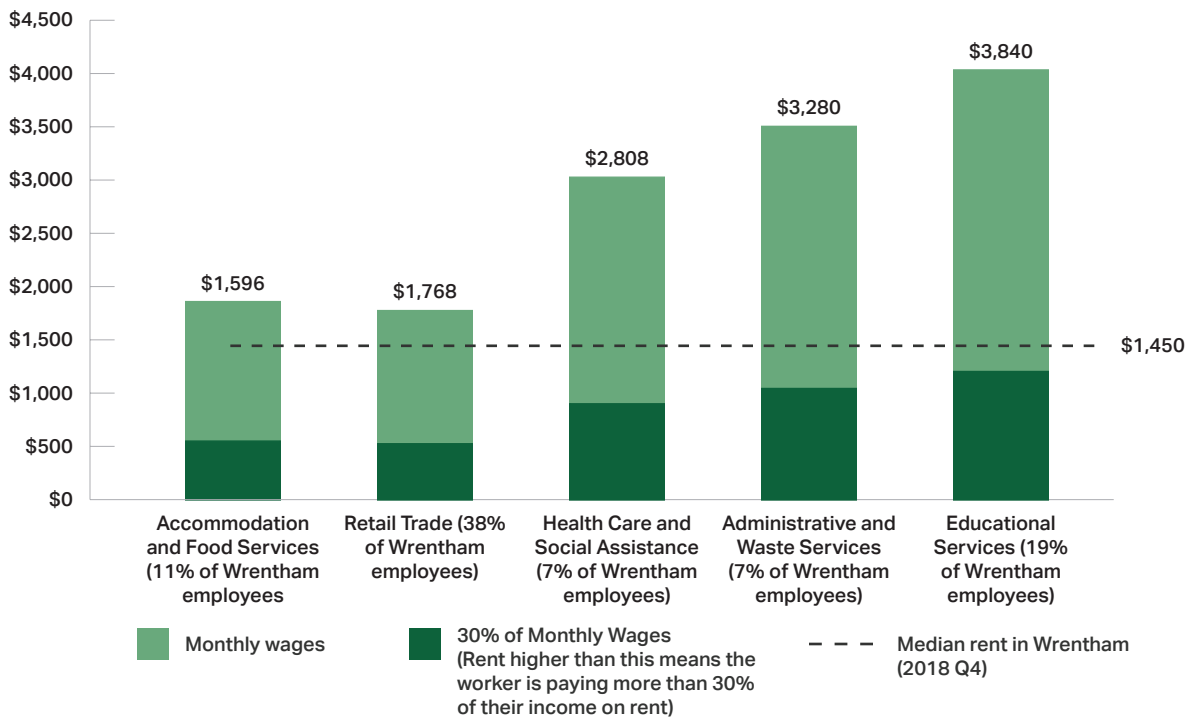


Source: ACS, EOLWD 2018, Town of Wrentham, Zillow Affordability Calculator

42 ACS, 5-Year Survey 2005-2009 through 2014-2018; EOLWD 2018; Town of Wrentham, 2020; Zillow Affordability Calculator

Renting a home is often within greater reach than homeownership because costs can be lower and there is no need for a down payment. However, the cost of an apartment in Wrentham is still out of reach for many people who work in town. Figure H-12 shows the median rent in Wrentham in 2018, as well as the average monthly wages of workers in the five biggest sectors in Wrentham—82% of employees in Wrentham work in these five sectors.⁴³ The average employee who worked in any of these five sectors and rented a home in Wrentham was cost-burdened, meaning they paid more than 30% of their income on housing. Specifically, a resident working in Accommodation and Food Services would have spent approximately 80% of their monthly income on housing.

Figure H-12. Wrentham employees' monthly wages vs. Wrentham rent, 2018



Yet another assessment of affordability is the match between the supply of Affordable Housing and the number of households that qualify for it. Although the median income is relatively high, there is a large portion of low-income residents. In 2015, almost 30% of households in Wrentham made less than 80% of the Area Median Income, qualifying them for Affordable Housing; far fewer than 30% of the housing units in Wrentham are Affordable Housing units.^{44,45}

43 Based on listings on Craigslist in the 4th quarter of 2016, including three 1-bedroom and four 2-bedroom apartments.

44 2015 HUD Section 8 Income Limits; 2013-2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy; ACS 2013-2017 5-Year Average, <<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cp.html>>

45 The discrepancy of 10 Affordable Housing units between this data from the 2013-2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy and the 2017 Subsidized Housing Inventory may be due to a loss of Affordable Housing units or inaccuracy in the data.



For every 1 Affordable Housing unit, there are
2.4 eligible households in Wrentham.



Table 3 provides more detail on this gap in Affordable Housing, including the federal income limits based on AMI that determine whether a household is eligible for Affordable Housing, and those income limits translated into dollars in the Boston metropolitan area. The range of incomes allows for different household size—as explained above, the income limit for a family of four is higher than the income limit of a family of two. Table H-3 also lists the number and percentage of households in Wrentham that qualify for Affordable Housing based on each income limit and the household size.

Table H-3: Wrentham households eligible for Affordable Housing, 2015

	# of Wrentham Renters	# of Wrentham Homeowners	Total # of Wrentham Households	% of Households (out of 4,076 in 2015)
Extremely low income, <30% Area Median Income	245	215	460	11%
Very low income, 30-50% Area Median Income	140	245	385	9%
Low Income, 50-80% Area Median Income	70	280	350	9%
TOTAL	455	740	1,195	29%

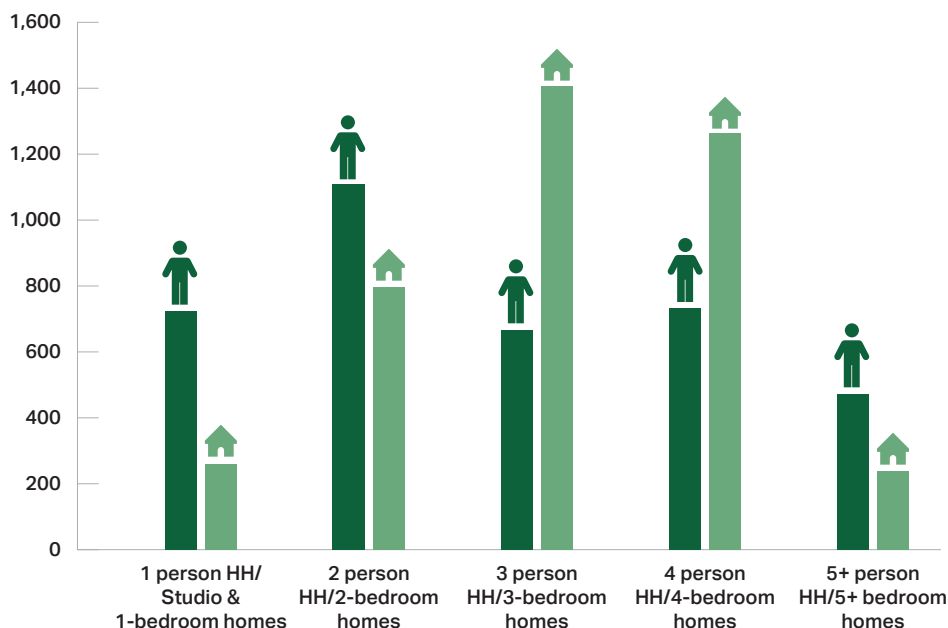
Source: 2013-2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy; ACS 2013-2017 5-Year Average, <<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cp.html>>

Variety of options

Not only does the price matter, but households also have different preferences for types of housing. In Wrentham, there is a mismatch between the number of people in an average household and the number of bedrooms in an average home, as illustrated in Figure H-14. While there are 1,830 one- or two-person households, there are only between 790 and 1,330 housing units with 2-bedrooms or less. This is consistent with the shrinking size of households and the slow housing production in the past decade, which has limited the amount of new housing stock that can respond to the shifting demographic needs.

In other words, smaller households such as young adults looking to move back to Wrentham, families wanting to buy their first home, one-parent households, and seniors looking to downsize all must compete for limited housing choices or possibly occupy housing they cannot afford (since price rises with square feet) and maybe even cannot maintain (since larger homes require more maintenance). The focus group with seniors conducted as part of the community engagement affirmed that some residents are remaining in homes larger than they would prefer because of lack of options.

Figure H-14. Housing size mismatch, 2010



Source: US Census, ACS 5-Year Estimate

Housing Opportunities and Constraints

The analysis of housing needs points to a demand for new housing opportunities, including lower-cost and smaller housing options or “Missing Middle” housing, as well as Affordable Housing units. Residential development is influenced by various factors, including historical development patterns, existing land use regulations, public investment, community support or opposition, market demand, natural resources protection areas, municipal infrastructure, and the availability of developable land. This section provides an overview of factors that provide opportunities and constraints impacting residential development in Wrentham, including physical and regulatory obstacles.

Municipal Tools

Wrentham has several existing assets to advance housing goals.

Wrentham’s Housing Authority operates two developments. Bennett Gardens includes 66 one-bedroom units for seniors and people with disabilities, and Emerald Lane includes 15 units of family housing with four 4 bedroom units, five 3 bedroom units, and six 2 bedroom units.

In 2016, the Town of Wrentham voted to adopt the Community Preservation Act, and a Community Preservation Committee was established to administer the funds. The Community Preservation Act, or CPA, was enacted by the Massachusetts legislature in 2000 to give communities a vehicle to fund open space preservation, Affordable Housing, historical preservation and recreation. Wrentham’s CPA funds have been approved for use in nine different projects, including the preparation of the 2020 Open Space and Recreation Plan, creation of a playground at the Rice Complex, and restoration of the paintings of a Wrentham resident and renowned artist. Two of the nine projects have been administered by the Wrentham Housing Authority, both of which were the installation of new basketball hoops. The CPA provides opportunity for further investment in Wrentham’s Affordable Housing stock (also known as “community housing”), which it has not yet provided.

Most recently, in 2019, Wrentham earned the Housing Choice Community designation for producing new housing and adopting best practices to promote sustainable housing development. The designation allows Wrentham to apply to exclusive Housing Choice Capital Grants, and bolsters its applications to other state funding programs, such as MassWorks and MassDOT capital projects.

In addition, there are several municipal tools that Wrentham could consider cultivating, depending on its goals.

Section 55C of Massachusetts General Law Chapter 44 enables the creation of a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund. A housing trust allows municipalities to collect funds for Affordable Housing and separate those funds from the general municipal budget. These funds can then be used for Affordable Housing production and preservation programs. Dozens of communities across the state currently have Affordable Housing trusts. CPC funds are the most common source of funding; other common sources include inclusionary zoning payments, other developer fees, a municipality’s general fund, tax title sales, donations, and payments from special bylaws. Wrentham does not have a housing trust.

In addition, Wrentham’s most recent Housing Production Plan (HPP) was adopted in 2005. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development approves HPPs for a five-year period, meaning that Wrentham’s HPP expired more than a decade ago. An updated Housing Production Plan would assist the Town in directing and leveraging its resources to meet the housing needs of Wrentham. They are useful supplements to Master Plans, providing a more detailed assessment of housing need, limitations, locations for potential housing development, goals, and strategies.

Zoning and Permitting

What is zoning?

Zoning is one of the most important tools a municipality has to help achieve the community's vision for the future. Modifications to the zoning and permitting requirements could improve the mix of housing available in Wrentham, in terms of affordability, housing diversity, and the development process.

Local zoning bylaws often define the allowable use of development, such as residential, commercial, or industrial, as well as characteristics such as the appropriate height, lots size, placement and massing of structures, and parking requirements. Importantly, while zoning regulates the use and design of development, zoning cannot mandate certain development to occur. For example, a community may desire a specific type of use to occur on a property, and it may be zoned to allow or even encourage such a use, but such investments in changes on a property are ultimately decided by private owners, institutions, or the entities that own or control the property. Unless the Town owns or controls a property and is willing to make an investment, it cannot mandate change through zoning.

The map on the next page shows the zoning districts in Wrentham, along with the land designated by the Town Assessor as both vacant and developable. Residential uses are allowed in R-30, R-43, R-87, VZ-A (Village District Zoning Subarea A), and VZ-B (Village District Zoning Subarea B). Based on the Assessor's data, there are significant areas for new development within all of these districts except for VZ-B.

Housing Diversity and Cost

The 2005 Housing Production Plan identified zoning as one of the key constraints to development: "Wrentham's zoning only permits single family homes by right...No zoning district in Wrentham currently permits more than 3 dwellings within a given building. Further, Wrentham zoning does not encourage smaller housing types which could be renter occupied. Addressing these permitting constraints is probably the most important task to facilitating greater production of affordable housing."⁴⁶

Recent re-zoning efforts have created more opportunity for residential development. In 2018, Wrentham adopted the Village Center District at Town Meeting to encourage a more attractive and walkable downtown. Its intent is to continue the downtown street grid to expand Wrentham's historic downtown by providing additional retail and housing, as well as mixed use development opportunities. The District is divided into two sub-areas: the traditional village (Subdistrict A) and the vacant Tyco site (Subdistrict B). The Village Center District allows for mixed-use of residential and commercial/service establishments to complement existing businesses, enhances walkability of the downtown, and helps ensure quality design. In terms of residential uses, a "double attached dwelling" (e.g. a two-unit rowhouse) and a "multiple attached dwelling" (e.g. a three-unit rowhouse) is permitted by special permit in some areas of the District, and mixed-use development (e.g. a shop on the first floor and multifamily housing above, or a shop adjacent to a multifamily building on the same lot) is permitted by special permit throughout the District. The lot requirements and dimensional standards are also relaxed, allowing for more compact, walkable development. There is potential for substantial new residential development in the Village Center. When the zoning was being considered for adoption, it was estimated that it could create the potential for approximately 230 new housing units.

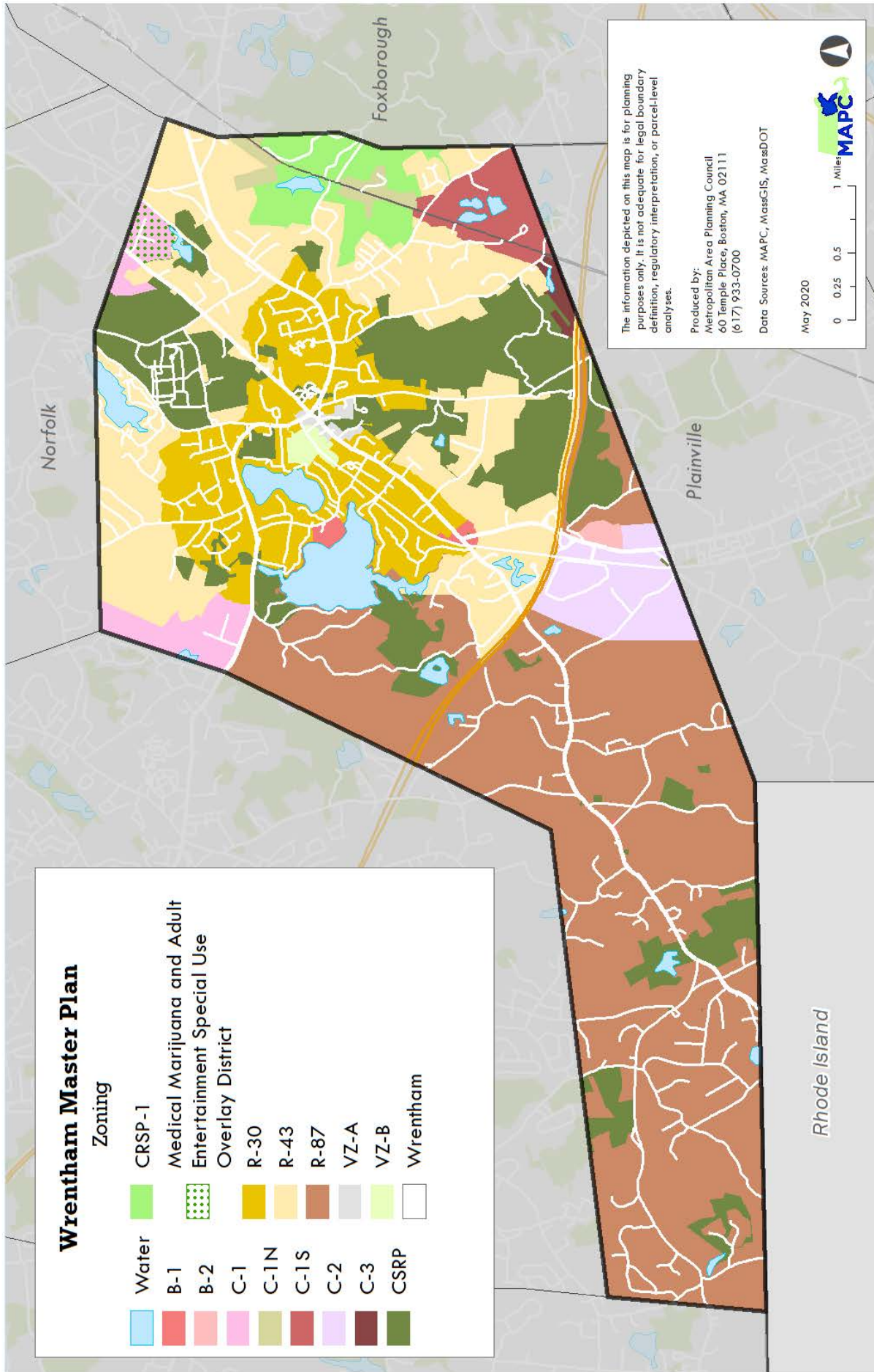
⁴⁶ Wrentham Housing Production Plan, 2005

In addition, a zoning amendment adopted in 2019 allows for accessory dwelling units (ADUs) or “granny flats”. According to Wrentham’s zoning, an ADU is a self-contained housing unit incorporated within a single-family home and must be occupied by a relative. Through this amendment, Wrentham helped increase the potential for smaller housing options, particularly for intergenerational households. Based on conversations with Town staff, since adoption of the amendment, there has been great interest in developing ADUs.

Nonetheless, as of 2020, single-family housing is still the only housing allowed by right in Wrentham. A special permit is required for a two-unit row house, a three-unit row house, and the conversion of a single family home to a two-unit row house. Special permits allow for Town Boards to hold more discretion over development approvals, and in doing so, they also introduce costs, uncertainty, and inefficiency in the development process.

Similarly, although the ADU bylaw created smaller housing options for family members of Wrentham homeowners, Wrentham’s zoning continues to create the conditions that promote larger housing types. One of the main factors in the cost of housing is the cost of land. In a desirable place like Wrentham, the cost of land is very high. To cover the cost of land, developers build larger, more expensive homes. Zoning regulations that require a certain amount of land for each new home add to the cost of building new housing. Developers then pass that cost on to the homebuyer.

For example, outside of the Downtown, each new home must be built on a lot of at least 30,000 square feet, more than a half-acre. Under current conditions, many of the homes in Wrentham’s neighborhoods that were built a few decades ago, such as along Archer Street or along Hamilton Road off of East Street, would no longer be permitted. The lot sizes in these areas are approximately 15,000 square feet or one-third of an acre, not meeting the 30,000 square feet minimum lot size requirement. Much of Wrentham falls within the R-87 zoning district, which requires 87,000 square feet or two acres per home. These requirements for single-family homes on large lots, in effect, encourage developers to build larger or more expensive homes in order to cover the cost of the land. There are trade-off’s to maintaining zoning that promotes single-family homes on lots of a certain size, and the increase in housing costs is one of the impacts to consider.



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Open Space Protection

Zoning can also help provide housing options while protecting natural resources and open space. Towns often require large lots with the intent of preserving rural character and open space, both of which are of highest priority to the Wrentham community. However, in many cases there are more effective ways to protect open space that do not add to the cost of housing—specifically, conserving land in perpetuity is the only sure-fire way to protect open space and should be a high priority for the Town over the next 10 years.

Wrentham's Open Space Preservation bylaw aims to do just this by providing developers an option to cluster the housing in a subdivision if they permanently protect some of the open space. The bylaw has helped to protect over 400 acres, including in the Pond Meadow, Wampanoag Estates, and Badus Brook developments. Wrentham's 2020 Open Space and Recreation Plan includes a recommendation to "encourage developers to use Open Space Preservation Bylaw" by amending the bylaw to allow Open Space Preservation development by right, as well as by promoting the benefits of open space preservation development.

Affordability

Wrentham's zoning does require Affordability in senior living communities: at least 5% of homeownership units and 25% of rental units in a senior living community must be Affordable. As of January 2021, one such project is currently being proposed. In addition, there are density bonus incentives for further Affordable Housing, meaning that developers may build a greater number of bedrooms if they provide more Affordable units.

Municipal Infrastructure

Although there are several private wastewater treatment facilities in the Town, Wrentham does not have a municipal sewer system. The lack of municipal infrastructure creates a significant obstacle to developing more housing, including in the Downtown. Institutions and larger campuses have met their needs independently: several municipal buildings in the Downtown area, including the new Public Safety building, share a small wastewater treatment facility with the Wrentham Elementary School; King Philip Regional High School maintains a large facility for its uses; the Wrentham Developmental Center has its own, older treatment facility; and the Wrentham Village Premium Outlets built a substantial treatment facility for its needs. Other private systems have also been installed at various sites. Unused septic and treatment facility capacity of oversized systems might be made available for use by local buildings constrained by the limitations their sites place on expansion of areas or uses. This could be helpful in areas where greater densities are sought such as in Downtown, or where soils cannot accept the anticipated burdens. Recent improvements and innovations in package treatment plants have greatly reduced the cost and area needed for new facilities, making them competitive with traditional septic systems in some instances. Private parties may also seek to create district treatment facilities to serve a local demand, helping to achieve desired levels of development.

Wrentham draws its water supply from a series of wells on the north and south sides of Lake Pearl. Those wells all draw from the Charles River Watershed. Other community wells are located near Crocker Pond and north of Thurston Street, with a transient well located to the eastern side of Route 1. Private wells exist off Beech Street, and on the Franklin line in Sheldonville. Most of Wrentham is served by municipal wells, but some private wells have been drilled, particularly in the Sheldonville area. The water division of the Department of Public Works maintains and operates the 79 miles of water mains. Like most communities in eastern Massachusetts, Wrentham is confined by annual withdrawal limits to its wells set by the Department of Environmental Protection.

Unlike water and sewer service, the provision of education and public safety services are not dependent on environmental factors, but rather on factors such as the municipal budget and the limitations imposed by Proposition 2 ½.⁴⁷ Wrentham has two elementary schools for the Town and participates in the King Philip Regional school system with Norfolk and Plainville. The King Philip High School is located in Wrentham, while the King Philip Middle School is located in Norfolk. Since 2005, school enrollment in the High School has increased by 5% and decreased by 10% in the Middle School.

Physical and natural constraints

The 2005 Housing Production Plan identified wetlands protections and requirements for wastewater treatment as another key constraint to development. If development continues to spread, new housing will be pushed to sites with poor soils and higher groundwater levels, requiring more expensive engineering solutions to treat wastewater.⁴⁸ However, zoning amendments, infrastructure investments, and other strategies can help support “smart growth,” in which development is more compact and efficient and directed towards locations more suitable for development, such as areas that have already been developed. Recent rezoning efforts in Downtown and along Route 1 help to direct growth to these strategic locations.

⁴⁷ Proposition 2 1/2 places constraints on the amount of property taxes a city or town can levy and on how much the levy can be increased from year to year.

⁴⁸ DEP regs 310 CMR 15.000 et seq., commonly referred to as “Title V”

Community engagement

Based on the town-wide survey conducted in Fall 2020 and focus groups conducted in January 2021, the following strengths, challenges, and opportunities related to housing were identified.

Strengths	Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong school system and lower taxes than closer to Boston• Proximity to Boston and Providence• Mixed-income housing at Eagle Brook is really helpful at preventing stigma against Affordable Housing residents• Eagle Brook provides an attractive for families and low-income households• Pond Meadow provides an attractive option for seniors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New housing is often large and expensive, i.e. “McMansions”• Lack of ownership options for smaller homes appropriate for seniors wanting to downsize and new households, suggesting demand for “Missing Middle” housing• Affordable Housing units are older and small• Lack of awareness and information about Affordable Housing units• Difficult for new residents to learn about local governance, as well as community activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential for housing development on vacant Tyco Valve site Downtown

Glossary

- **Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU):** A secondary dwelling unit on the same lot as the primary dwelling unit, commonly referred to as “in-law unit” or “granny flat”. See Housing Goal #3 Strategy #3.
- **Affordable Housing:** Low and moderate income housing for individuals and families, also known as “community housing”.

More specifically, Affordable Housing is deed restricted to cost no more than 30% of income for households meeting specific income thresholds. Typically, “Affordable Housing” is for “low-income” households, those at or below 80% of the area median income (AMI), but it can be reserved for those with lower or higher incomes. (See definitions for “low income,” “very low income,” and “extremely low income.”)
- **Area Median Income (AMI):** A measure of income set by the federal government and used by housing programs to determine eligibility for deed-restricted Affordable Housing based on income and household size. The AMI for the geographic area that includes Wrentham is \$119,000 (US Department of Housing & Urban Development).
- **By right:** Allowed according to zoning regulations; does not require any discretionary action by the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals. See “Special Permit”
- **Chapter 40B:** Under the Massachusetts’ Comprehensive Permit law, enacted in 1969, in municipalities where less than 10% of the year-round housing is Affordable Housing, developers of low- and moderate-income housing can pursue expedited local review under the comprehensive permit process and request a limited waiver of local zoning. If their application is denied or approved with conditions that render it uneconomic, developers can appeal to the state to overturn the local decision if it is found unreasonable. (Chapter 774 of the Acts of 1969; M.G.L.c.40B§20-23)
- **Community Housing:** See Affordable Housing
- **Cost Burden:** Paying more than 30% of income on housing. Paying more than 50% of income on housing is called severe cost burden. In Lynn, 25% of households are cost burdened and 21% are severely cost burdened (ACS, 2013-17).
- **Deed Restriction or Deed Rider:** A legal mechanism that limits how a home can be used, who can live there, housing costs, and how the home can be transferred. This is the mechanism to ensure Affordable Housing is reserved for specific income groups at a price they can afford over a specified time period.
- **Household:** The people living together in the same house. A household can be a family, roommates, or a person living alone
- **Inclusionary Zoning:** A local zoning policy that requires or encourages developers of residential developments over a certain scale to include Affordable Housing or to make payments to the locality for development of such housing elsewhere. The policy typically offers incentives such as increased density, reduced parking requirements, or expedited permitting to offset the financial impacts of providing Affordable Housing.

- **Income-Eligible Household:** A household that meets the income requirements of a housing program; these are typically low-income households defined as having incomes at or below 80% of AMI. In Wrentham, that's \$86,650 for a 3-person household (US Department of Housing & Urban Development).
- **Low-Income Household:** Generally speaking, a household with income below 80% of AMI, including very low-income and extremely-low-income households). More specifically—in the context of other income thresholds, such as very-low income and extremely-low income—low-income refers to households with income between 50% and 80% of AMI.
- **Market-Rate Housing:** Housing that sells or leases at the “going rate” on the free market.
- **Mixed-Income Housing Development:** Development that includes housing affordable to households with different incomes, typically including market-rate housing and deed-restricted Affordable Housing for lower-income households.
- **Multifamily Housing:** Buildings with more than one unit, such as apartment buildings, condominiums, townhouses, or duplexes. There is a wide range of multifamily housing that differs in scale and design.
- **Single-Family Housing:** A structure maintained and used as a single dwelling unit. Single-family housing is owned by a single owner, has no shared property or common walls, has private access to the street from the structure, and has only one set of utilities
- **Special permit:** A discretionary action subject to review and approval by the zoning regulatory body (either the Wrentham Planning Board or Wrentham Zoning Board of Appeals depending on the use) that allows for a use, dimension, or development type outside of those allowed by-right according to the Zoning Bylaw. See “By right”
- **Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI):** In Massachusetts, the SHI is maintained by the MA Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) and used to measure each municipality's supply of Affordable Housing for the purposes of Chapter 40B. The SHI includes all housing developed under Chapter 40B, including both Affordable Housing and market-rate units in rental developments, and other deed-restricted Affordable Housing,

