



Chapter A Vision for Dedham

Introduction

The vision is the core of the Master Plan. It frames the values and priorities at the center of all other recommendations. The goals and strategies of the Master Plan are intended to bring the shared vision for Dedham into reality over the next ten years.

In this Chapter, an introduction frames the relationship of the vision to the Master Plan content. A narrative highlights the history of Dedham and how the Town's legacies are carried forward to the present. The vision statement is composed both of a narrative and bulleted commitments. This is followed by core priorities that have been defined by the community and recurring themes that emerged across conversations throughout the Master Plan process.



Designing Dedham 2030 A Vision for Dedham

Introduction

Dedham’s Master Plan addresses the current needs and priorities of the Town for the next 10 years based on a robust community engagement process with input from all of Dedham’s neighborhoods and engagement with thousands of residents. This is a result of Dedham’s commitment to long-range planning; in 2007, Town Meeting voted to engage in a comprehensive master planning process every ten years.

The process is an important way to have the residents of the Town speak to each other, reflect on where the Town is today, and to define new ideas and ambitions for the future. The Designing Dedham Master Plan Committee drafted this Vision Statement to reflect the overarching values and priorities that have been shared by community members through surveys, meetings, and workshops over the course of this two-year process. The Vision Statement has been written, reviewed, and edited, to ensure it is representative of the broad diversity of Dedham’s community and inclusive of the ideas and ambitions that have been articulated by hundreds of residents.

As can be seen in the diagram to the right, the Vision Statement is at the center of the Master Plan content. All other themes and topics flow from and relate back to this core element of the Vision Statement.





Dedham Yesterday and Today

Dedham is a vibrant community with diverse residential neighborhoods, thriving and convenient commercial and neighborhood centers, rich and well-managed natural and historic assets, and a strong record of fiscal responsibility and financial management. Dedham acknowledges that the history of this place and its land predate the history of the Town and recognizes the Massachusetts and Wampanoag People on whose ancestral lands the Town of Dedham resides. The positive beginning marked by Dedham's incorporation in 1636 also marks a painful era and an ending for many diverse indigenous peoples.

Since its incorporation, Dedham has embraced forward-thinking, ambitious, and innovative efforts such as creating the country's first human-made canal, the Mother Brook, attracting industry, mills, and a diverse ethnic population. The Town took early steps to advance education, opportunity, and equity for its residents by establishing the nation's first tax-supported and free public school. Dedham supported the defense of human dignity and freedom through the organization of civil war regiments, including the historic 54th Regiment at Camp Meigs. The Town has proactively and responsibly planned for Town facilities and amenities, such as the care and stewardship of the historic Endicott Estate and the grassroots support and partnership to reuse the Avery School as the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center.

Throughout its history the Town has faced challenges and the two years during which this Master Plan was prepared have been a challenging time. The global spread of COVID-19 has both ended and upended lives. It has also highlighted the importance of planning for a future with more risks, defined new ways of engaging in civic discourse, and confirmed the importance of integrating public health with the Master Plan. It has also been made painfully clear, through the disparate outcomes and impacts of COVID-19, that the racial and social inequities that have been present for generations continue to be present today.

In the same two years, the nationwide reckoning with continued racial and social injustices has grown an awareness that all communities need to reexamine practices, conventions, and regulations that serve to exclude groups of people from full participation in opportunities, institutions, and resources. In Dedham, this reexamination sheds new light on some parts of its history where past practices may not match current ideals. It is through these continued experiences that the Vision Statement for this Master Plan is written with a sense of optimism, knowing that the challenges faced by the Town are becoming more widely known and more clearly articulated, and that a dialogue is underway to meet these challenges and enrich the lives of all residents.



A Vision for Dedham Tomorrow

As Dedham looks to 2030, the Town is poised to continue its great heritage of bold leadership while at the same time ensuring that such leadership is in service of and with the participation of all of its residents. Dedham has the opportunity to advance its legacies of environmental, social, and fiscal sustainability while recognizing that inclusivity and respect are fundamental for the success of the community and the individuals who live here. The Town recognizes that all residents, much like the Master Plan topics, are interconnected and that it is important to remain engaged in the process of drawing the threads of community together so that all residents may enjoy a high quality of life with livable neighborhoods that prioritize walking and biking and embrace inclusion and equity, all through aligned and effective policies. Dedham is committed to this vision by:



Designing Dedham 2030 Vision Statement

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- Creating a community where residents of all backgrounds and ages can thrive and be healthy;
- Strengthening and connecting the compact and walkable places of each neighborhood to build vibrancy and unity across the Town;
- Striving toward inclusiveness in the Town by increasing access to quality housing, transportation choices, recreation and open space, governance, and economic opportunity;
- Managing growth strategically to invest in and support local businesses, neighborhoods, vibrant business districts, thriving employment centers, and active transit hubs;
- Creating more opportunities to safely walk or bike to destinations, services, amenities, and resources within each neighborhood and across the Town;
- Committing to strong, quality and equitable education as a public good and empowering learning opportunities for people of all ages, needs, and interests;
- Strengthening inclusive self-governance that benefits from nurturing broad civic engagement across neighborhoods and ethnic backgrounds by creating more opportunities for all residents to be heard, to participate, and to be invested in decisions for the future;
- Celebrating the diversity of ethnicity, culture, and nationalities found in Dedham and supporting groups that have been marginalized through its history;
- Supporting stewardship of historic, cultural and natural assets to provide high quality shared amenities and to enhance livability;
- Planning for future needs and challenges, including regional and climate-related, in order to plan accordingly and equip the Town's workforce to manage change while providing transparent and resident-centered public services;
- Balancing the above commitments with an understanding that they are all interconnected.



Designing Dedham 2030 Core Priorities

Core priorities for the Master Plan were identified by the Dedham community through the Initial Community Survey and Virtual Visioning Workshop. The online and in-meeting survey asked two important questions related to the Vision Statement.

The first question was about the magnitude of change residents feel is necessary to move Dedham toward their ideal vision for the Town. This question asked “How close is Dedham to the vision you imagine for the Town?” The most frequent response was “the Town needs some minor improvements” with 47% of the responses. The second most frequent response was “the Town needs some major improvements” with 42% of the responses. The next most frequent response was “the Town is far from my ideal vision” with 6% of the responses. The least frequent response was “the Town is close to my ideal vision” with 5% of the responses. This shows a broad recognition that improvements are needed and that it is valuable to establish a vision and work toward it.

The second important question was about the core priorities that residents have for the Town. This question asked “what set of words would best describe your top goals for the Town of Dedham?” **The three most frequent responses for most important were “fiscally responsible,” “sustainable,” and “inclusive.”** These responses resonated throughout feedback and conversations throughout the Master Plan process. They are integrated into the Vision Statement and form the foundation for many of the goals and strategies.

Core Priorities are highlighted in the plan with the following icons.



Fiscally Responsible

Dedham has strong financial health and residents see this as a core priority and value. Dedham consistently taxes below its levy capacity. It has productive commercial properties that shift over 30% of the local tax burden away from residents. It does not rely heavily on State Aid to finance infrastructure or services, accounting for only 8.7% of all revenues in the most recently audited fiscal year. The Town has a AAA rating by Standard and Poor’s which translates to reasonable borrowing rates. The Town has a history of a fully funded pension and benefits program for its municipal workforce. All of these attributes indicate strong financial health and Dedham residents highlight a continuation of this fiscal responsibility into the future as a core priority.

Fiscal responsibility does not equate to not spending money or investing in capital projects, staff, or services, but rather ensuring those investments are sensible and effective. For example, all facilities, particularly aging assets, require regular renewal and investment to avoid a backlog of deferred maintenance and related facilities issues. It is fiscally responsible to proactively maintain those facilities to avoid potentially larger and more urgent expenditures if issues remain unaddressed. The Master Plan elevates fiscal responsibility in all topics with a particular focus in the Community Facilities and Services and Governance topics.



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Sustainable

In 2020, Dedham completed the Sustainable Dedham Climate Action and Resiliency Plan. In that plan, the decades of sustainability in Dedham are highlighted. Dedham’s Sustainability Advisory Committee was formed in 2008 to advance the Town’s commitment to addressing the impacts of pollution and climate change. In 2018, the Town joined the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, working with other municipalities to advance climate change resiliency and mitigation efforts. Also in 2018, the Town participated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Planning and Grant Program to assess the Town’s vulnerability to climate change. In 2019, the Town was awarded an MVP Action Grant to develop the Climate Action and Resiliency Plan.

The environmental sustainability of the community has clearly been a priority in Dedham. Sustainability also includes economic and social responsibilities. Economic sustainability is well-aligned with the first core priority of fiscally responsible. Social sustainability appears to require more attention and prioritization to elevate the needs of the community including the needs for expanded social programming, affordable housing, and livable communities. Elevating these aspects of sustainability are integrated throughout many of the Master Plan topics and connect to the third core priority of inclusive.



Inclusive

Relative to the other two core priorities, it could be observed that inclusive is a newer core priority for the Town, but one where recent progress has been made. The Dedham Human Rights Commission was created by a vote of Town Meeting in November of 2017. It ensures that all residents of the Town enjoy equal opportunity to participate in and enjoy life in the Town. Also in 2017, Dedham Public Schools introduced an Equity and Inclusion Task Force, to improve efforts to welcome all members of the Dedham community. One of the outcomes of this effort was the hiring of a new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer for Dedham Public Schools in 2020.

New Town investments such as the playground at the Early Childhood Education Center are universally accessible and more inclusive. While not a Town entity, the Dedham Historical Society & Museum has reflected this core priority by highlighting Black history in Dedham and Dedham’s Indigenous histories through programming and exhibits. The “I am Dedham” monthly Dedham TV series spotlights the diversity of the community by sharing stories and experiences in Dedham. Residents have also joined together to form advocacy groups to build community and take on inclusive projects, such as honoring William B. Gould in East Dedham. The Master Plan builds on this momentum by defining goals and strategies that would expand inclusion through many of the Master Plan topics.



Designing Dedham 2030 Cross-cutting Themes

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In addition to the core priorities that have been elevated by the community and integrated in the Vision Statement and throughout the Master Plan content, four cross-cutting themes have been identified. The cross-cutting themes were identified as the goals and strategies for each topic began to take shape based on feedback and discussion with the community primarily through the topic workshops. Dedham resident quotes highlighted from these conversations are shared below. The cross-cutting themes include inclusion and equity, walking and biking, livability and quality of life, and aligned and effective policies.

Inclusion and equity are integrated into 12 of the 48 total goals across 7 out of 8 topics of the Master Plan. Walking and biking is integrated into 7 of the 48 total goals across 6 out of 8 topics. Livability and quality of life are integrated into 12 of the 48 total goals across 6 out of 8 topics. Aligned and effective policies are integrated into 17 of the 48 total goals across all the topics.

Cross-cutting themes are highlighted in the plan with the icons that follow with a discussion of the themes on the following pages. Quotes from residents that representative of many comments heard throughout the process are included below.





Designing Dedham 2030 Cross-cutting Themes



Inclusion and equity

In the context of a municipal master plan, equity is setting the circumstances for all residents to have access to opportunities that enable them to attain their full potential. This includes growing up safe and healthy, receiving a quality education, getting a good job, enjoying a high quality of life, and aging comfortably. This statement is adapted from MAPC's work in supporting an equitable region.

A more formal definition of equity found in the MAPC State of Equity with inspiration from Policy Link, King County Office of Equity and Social Justice as follows. Equity is the condition of fair and just inclusion into a society. Equity will exist when those who have been most marginalized have equal access to opportunities, power, participation and resources and all have avenues to safe, healthy, productive, and fulfilling lives. It requires restructuring deeply entrenched systems of privilege and oppression that have led to the uneven distribution of benefits and burdens over multiple generations.

For example, in the Public Health and Livability Chapter, residents with existing medical conditions, or without support mechanisms (i.e. a lack of access to air conditioning or health care services), including older adults, lower income populations, and young children typically face the greatest climate change related health risks and therefore may need more resources dedicated to their future health and climate mitigation than others.



Walking and biking

The COVID-19 pandemic has given many people a renewed connection to their local neighborhood, surrounding parks, and amenities as many stayed closer to home throughout the day. This pandemic disruption has highlighted and broadened a need for improved conditions for walking and biking in Dedham's neighborhoods and across the Town. Getting around is a part of daily life and safe and attractive options for walking and biking encourage more people to choose not to drive for certain trips. In addition to walking and biking, traffic congestion has been frequently raised as a concern and a theme in many discussions. These issues are closely connected. The more people who choose to make a trip by foot or bicycle, the less cars will be on the road causing backups. While not all traffic is generated from local trips, a reduction of local vehicular trips would help to reduce traffic congestion.

Improved infrastructure for safe and attractive walking and biking encourages a mode shift, choosing one way to get around (biking and walking) over another (private vehicles). This mode shift is particularly beneficial because it also has environmental (reduced pollution), economic (reduction of lost time in traffic), and health (more physical activity) benefits. Improved walking and biking infrastructure will not shift all trips from private vehicles but will make it more likely that residents will choose to make some trips this way. Master Plan goals and strategies define approaches to addressing this theme.



Designing Dedham 2030 Cross-cutting Themes



Livability and quality of life

AARP defines a livable community as one that is safe and secure, has affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options, and offers supportive community features and services. Once in place, those resources enhance personal independence, allow residents to remain in their homes and communities as they age, and foster residents' engagement in the community's civic, economic, and social life.

Another concept of livability and quality of life is promoted by 80 Cities and that is simply that whether you're 8 years old or 80 years old, your city or town should work for everyone. If everything from parks, sidewalks, housing, and transportation works well for an 8 year old and an 80 year old, then it will be great for all people.

Planning plays a key role in engaging community members in developing a vision for the future, setting the conditions for what and where changes will occur, and ultimately enhancing livability and quality of life. All the features of the physical environment should positively contribute to the daily lives of residents. A variety of active and passive recreation opportunities should be available nearby. Getting around should be safe and convenient. Shops and services should be available and accessible. Housing should be available to support residents' needs. Many of the Master Plan goals and strategies are intended to positively impact livability and quality of life either directly or indirectly.



Aligned and effective policies

Across all topics discussed in the Master Plan, residents would eventually say something like the “goals and ideas are great, but we need to make sure something happens.” This sentiment points to both the implementation of the Master Plan and the need for effective policies that are aligned with the Master Plan. All topics of the Master Plan have at least one goal and a set of strategies that is define aligning policies with the Master Plan and thereby improving their effectiveness in advancing the Town toward the shared community vision.

These goals and strategies take a few forms. In the Land Use and Zoning Chapter the recommendations focus on modifications to the Town's Zoning Bylaw and development approval processes. In the Transportation and Connectivity chapter the recommendations focus on staff support for transportation projects and advancing from planning to implementation. In the Governance Chapter the recommendations focus on the resident experience with local services, transparency, and representation among decision-makers to move toward aligned and effective policies. Each of the Master Plan chapters provide a focus on this type of alignment because it was raised so frequently as a concern and opportunity for improvement.