

Land Use and Zoning

Draft Existing Conditions

Introduction

The Land Use element focuses on Wrentham's historical and existing land use patterns and current policies and regulations that help shape how and where new growth and development can occur in the Town. Land use encompasses a community's development character – from the amount, type, and intensity of commercial and residential uses to the placement of land uses to ensure environmental resources are preserved and sites are designed with residents and visitors in mind. Effective land use goals, policies, and strategies can help Wrentham achieve its vision of preserving farmland and open space, becoming more walkable and bikeable, and strengthening Downtown and other village centers with more small businesses, dining options, homes, and places to gather (see the complete Vision Statement in [Phase I of the Master Plan](#)). Land use regulations can also help preserve and enhance the historic development patterns that exist in the Wrentham's village centers (see also the Cultural Resources element).

Land use decisions and regulations have lasting impacts on the physical form of communities and the composition of the population, including the racial diversity of places. In Massachusetts, like other parts of the country, cities and towns passed restrictive zoning rules, such as large minimum lot size requirements and prohibitions on multifamily housing which have narrowed the range and affordability of housing options. This lack of diverse housing options, combined with racial disparities in homeownership and wealth creation due to inequitable financing and lending practices (e.g., redlining in the mid-20th century) have contributed to a lack of racial diversity in many suburban communities. This has contributed to a segregated Greater Boston region, with the suburbs surrounding Boston, including Wrentham, being predominantly white.¹

Wrentham's land use decisions also contribute to the Greater Boston region and have impacts beyond the Town's borders. Wrentham is part of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) region and Southwest Advisory Planning (SWAP) Committee subregion. Collaborating with adjacent cities and towns on land use decisions can help ensure more effective planning of infrastructure, transportation, and economic development. This collaboration includes working with MAPC to play a role in advancing MetroCommon 2050, the Greater Boston regional plan, through smart growth land use decisions and shared regional resources to achieve local goals that benefit the residents and visitors of Wrentham.

Quick facts

- 43% (approximately 6,168 acres) of Wrentham's land area is comprised of residential land uses.
- A large share (22%) of Wrentham's land is in public use, largely due to the Wrentham Developmental Center being sited in Town.

Progress since the 2004 Master Plan

The 2004 Wrentham Master Plan identified land use opportunities to better guide how growth and development occurs. Since 2004, the Town has:

- Completed a corridor study of Route 1A and updated zoning along the corridor
- Adopted the Village Zone overlay to guide development in Downtown Wrentham
- Updated zoning regulations to better address emerging planning issues like senior living housing, accessory dwelling units, and breweries

¹ <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2020/12/08/boston-segregation/>

- 12% (approximately 1,785 acres) of land is used for commercial or industrial uses.
- Of the nearly 2,200 new homes built between 1980 and 2018, only 198 (1%) were multi-family units.

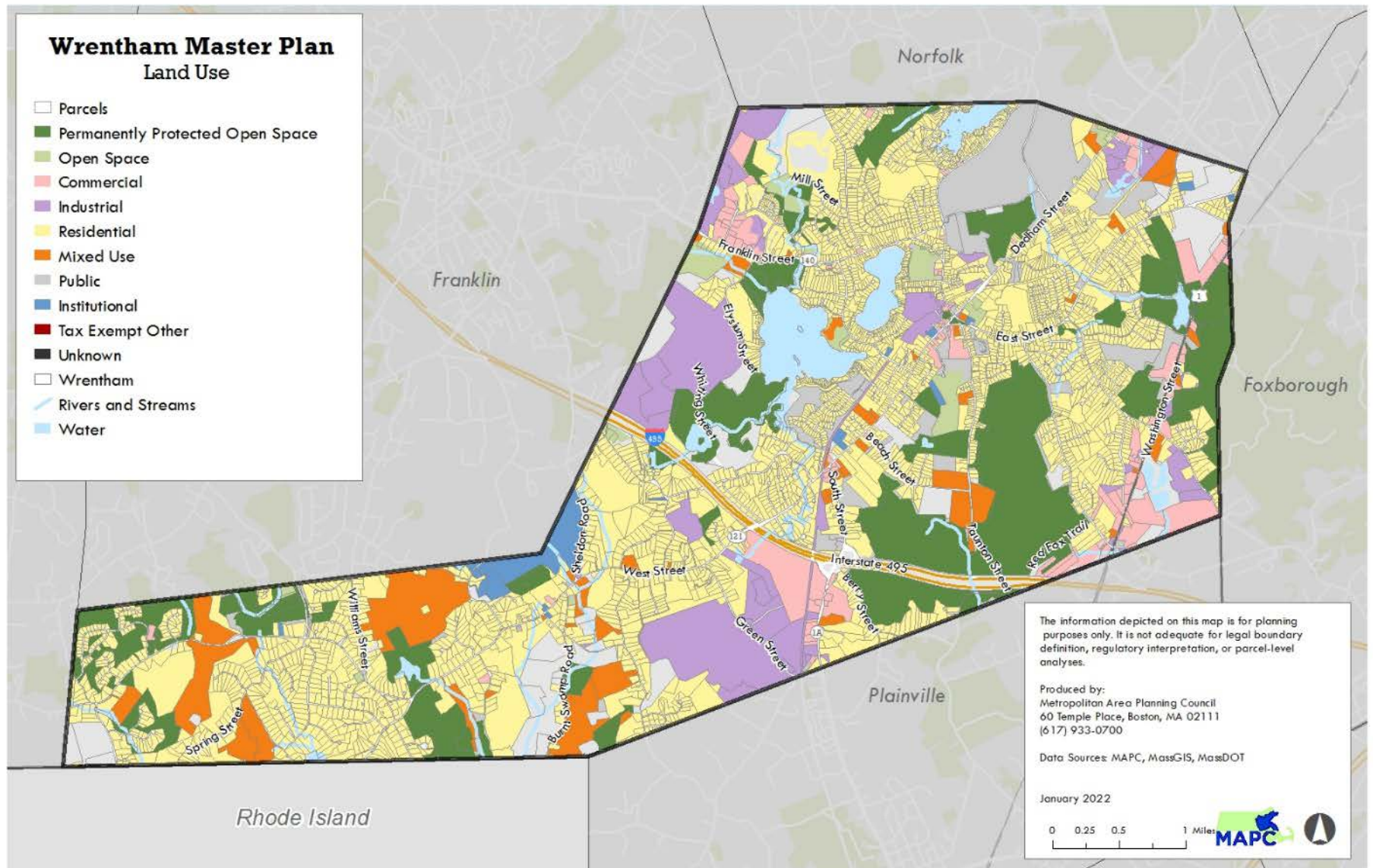
Key themes/findings

- The Town has had success in recent rezoning efforts (e.g., Downtown, Route 1). Continuing to update and refine the Town's zoning can help achieve the community's vision to create walkable, compact centers where new neighborhood businesses and job opportunities could thrive alongside different housing types.
 - Special planning efforts targeted at key areas, such as the Wrentham Developmental Center, Sheldonville, Wampum Corner, and the Premium Outlets, will ensure the zoning bylaw reflects how communities want growth and development to occur.
- The Town's residential zoning districts require larger lot sizes due to the unavailability of public sewer. While larger lot sizes are appropriate until public sewer is available, adding more flexibility to residential uses and dimensional standards could expand housing choices in Wrentham. (See Housing Goal 3)
- Lots created prior to the enactment of the current large minimum lot standards have resulted in many legal non-conforming parcels. This is especially prevalent near the lakes and village centers of downtown, Wampum Corner, and Sheldonville. When considering future zoning bylaw amendments, the Town could consider how to update minimum lot size requirements in certain areas to maintain the neighborhood character.
- The Open Space Preservation Development bylaw allows for smaller lot sizes when subdivisions include permanently protected open space. However, requirements such as the eight-acre minimum development size and 500-ft setback for dwellings might be limiting the applicability. The bylaw also has a liberal definition for what qualifies as open space, which can work against the goals for active open space preservation. A review of the OSPD bylaw could be beneficial to help guide future growth of undeveloped parcels in the Town.
- Wrentham is considered a "MBTA Community" and subject to recent *Housing Choice* zoning reforms that promote multi-family zoning near transit, or if no stations exist in a community, in locations consistent with sustainable development principles – like downtown Wrentham or other existing village centers. Wrentham will need to undertake a planning process to comply with this new legislation.
- Downtown's updated Village Zone district promotes walkable, compact development that is consistent with the historic architectural style. Pursuing a formal historic designation for downtown (see the Cultural Resources Element) and strengthening the coordination between the Planning Board and the Historical Commission regarding downtown development review can help maintain the area's historic integrity.

Existing Land Uses

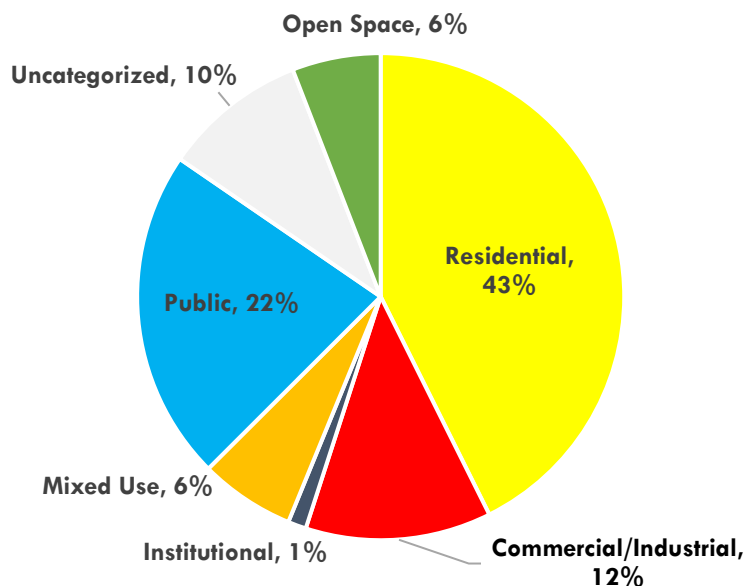
Over its development history as a town, Wrentham has predominantly been an agricultural community dotted with village centers, including Downtown (where Town Common is located), Sheldonville, and Wampum Corner. Residential development has happened over time, primarily along the major roadways as cul-de-sacs or loops off main roads. In the 1980s and 1990s, a development boom resulted in large areas of undeveloped land being subdivided to accommodate the large minimum lot sizes required by the three residential zoning districts (30,000 square feet, one acre, and two acres). The Premium Outlets opened in 1997, creating a significant new employment node near Interstate 495. Map 1 shows the location of existing land uses. Figure 1 shows the distribution of existing land uses today.

Map 1 – Existing Land Uses



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Figure 1 – Share of Existing Land Uses



Source: MassGIS

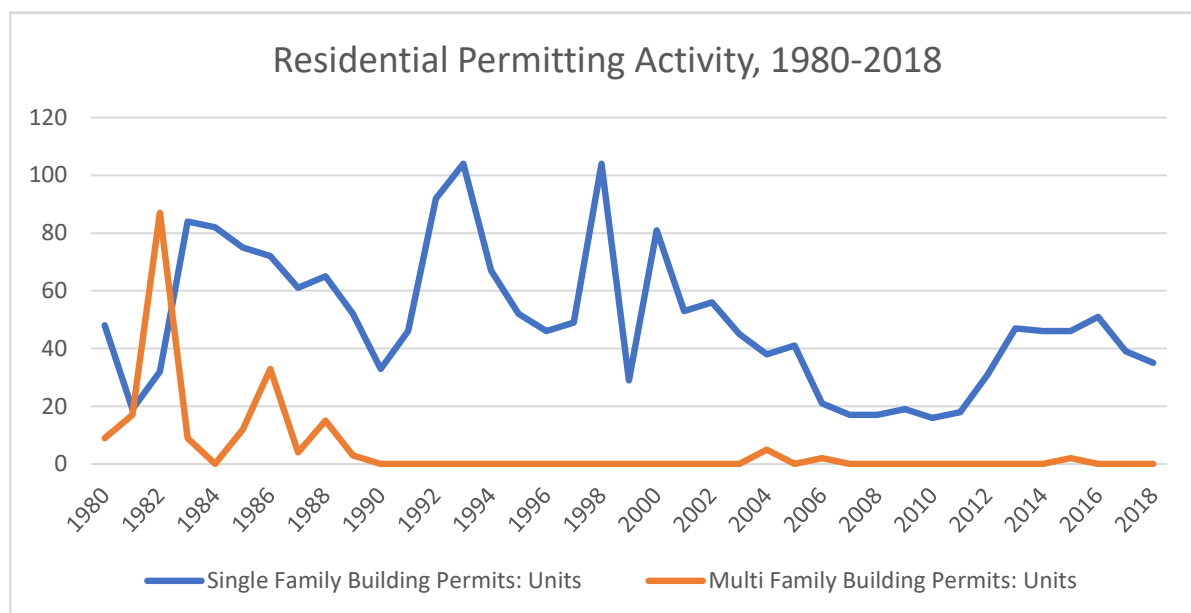
Growth and Development

Beginning in the 1970s, Wrentham transitioned to a suburban, more populous town. That was, in part, due to the construction of Interstate 495 in the 1960s. The highway made Wrentham more accessible to employment centers around the region, and both residential and commercial growth occurred in the town. While many suburbs surrounding Boston became bedroom communities for surrounding employment centers, Wrentham is unique in that there are more jobs than households in the town. However, only 530 Wrentham residents live and work in Wrentham, while nearly 6,000 residents leave Wrentham for work². This data reinforces that there is a mismatch between the local workforce and local jobs (see the Economic Development element from Phase I). Those working jobs located in Wrentham, especially the jobs in lower-paying retail and service industries, may not be able to afford housing in Wrentham due to the limited supply of housing options (see also the Housing element from Phase I).

Figure 2 shows the residential permitting activity from 1980-2018. Nearly 2,000 new single-family homes were built during this time. A significantly smaller number of multi-family units – only 198 homes – were constructed. New multi-family development, which includes everything from 2-unit duplexes to larger scale apartment complexes, was virtually nonexistent after 1990. The next section on Wrentham's zoning regulations helps articulate why residential development has been limited to single-family homes.

² On the Map, US Census Bureau. See the Transportation Element for additional information on work commutes.

Figure 2 – Residential Permitting Activity, 1980-2018



Source: US Census Bureau, Building Permit Survey. Note: In 2018, the Town only reported permitting data for 8 out of 12 months.

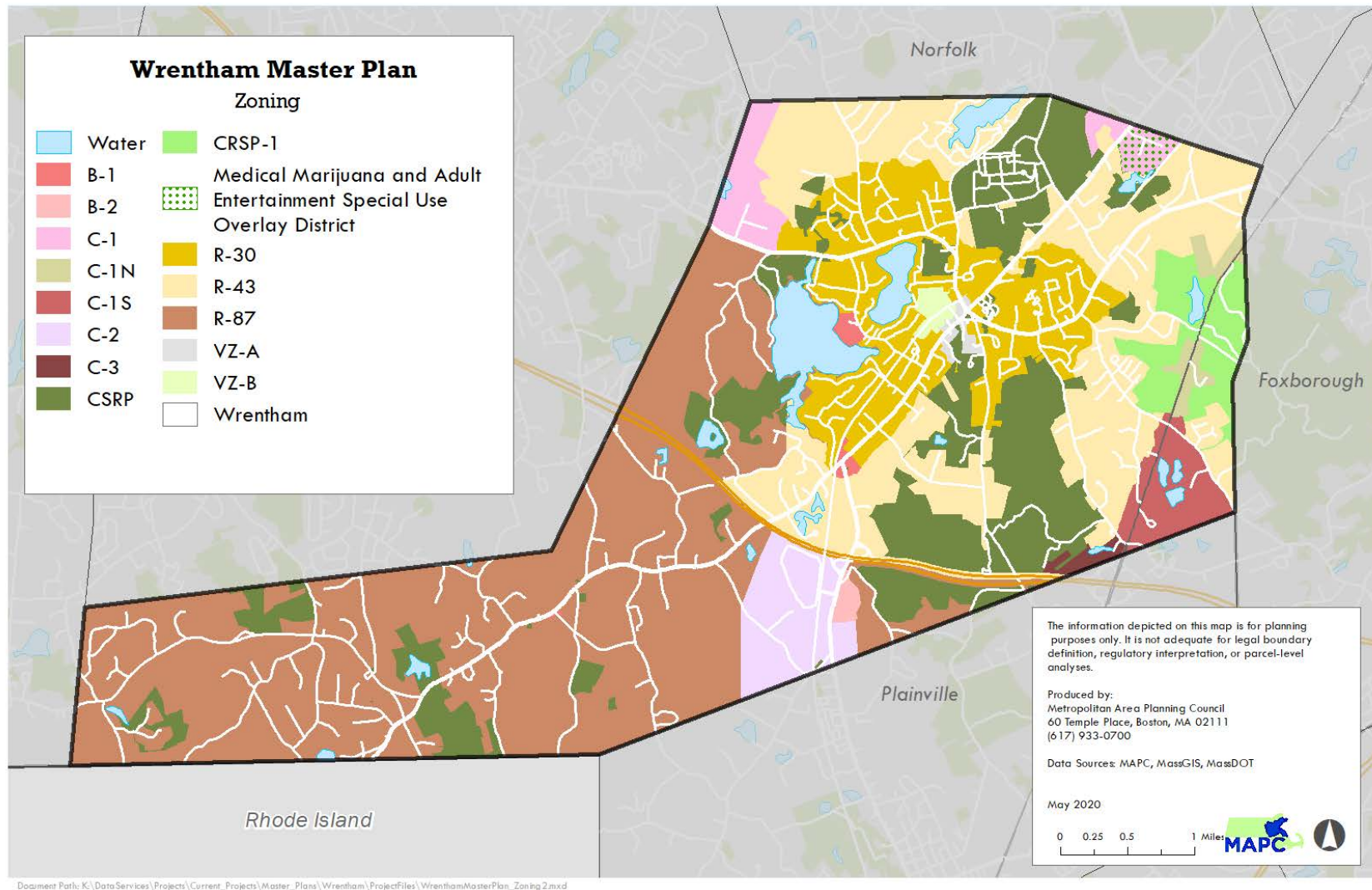
Commercial Growth and Development

Wrentham has five main commercial districts: Downtown, Route 1, Wampum Corner, Premium Outlets, and the western portion of Route 140. There have been very few new commercial developments in recent years. Updates to the zoning bylaw, like the new Route 1 zoning district, aim to attract new economic development opportunities to the Town. (See the Economic Development element from Phase I for more information).

Wrentham Zoning

Zoning regulations guide how and where growth occurs in a community. Wrentham's zoning bylaw was first adopted in 1960. The Town established three major residential zoning districts that required minimum lot sizes of 30,000 square feet, one acre, and two acres respectively. Requiring larger lot sizes was a strategy to protect open space and allow space for on-site well and septic systems. Growth in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in the carving up of large areas of undeveloped land to accommodate these larger lot sizes. Map 2 shows the Town's zoning map.

Map 2 – Zoning Map



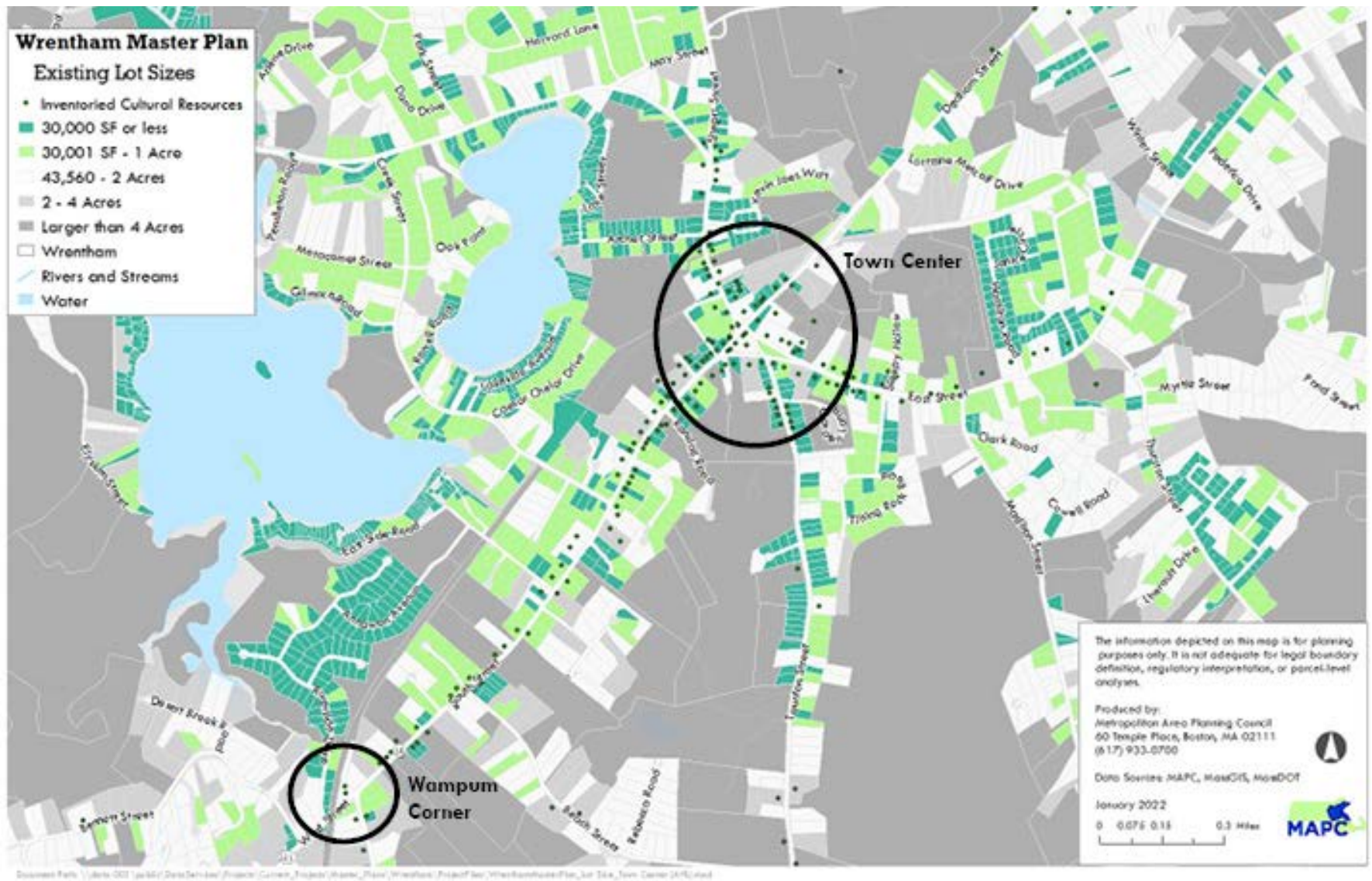
Residential Zoning

As previously mentioned, the Town has three residential districts that all require large minimum lot sizes, largely due to the lack of public sewer. All new development in Wrentham requires on-site septic systems, which are regulated by Title 5 Septic System program administered by the Massachusetts Department of Environment Protection. Title 5 has minimum square footage requirements for different land uses, based on anticipated waste. The R-30 district, which surrounds town center, Lake Pearl, and Lake Archer, requires a minimum of 30,000 square feet. Wrentham's R-87 district requires 2-acre minimum lot sizes and is primarily the area northeast of I-495 and west of Lake Pearl. The R-43 district, which requires 1-acre lot sizes, is mostly in the area northeast of I-495 and surrounding the R-30 district to create a gradual decrease in density as growth extends out from town center. The R-43 and R-87 zoning districts require larger lot sizes to help preserve the rural character of outlying areas.

Prior to the advent of the current zoning and septic system regulations, lots in Wrentham were historically smaller. Maps 3 and 4 show the lots that are less than 30,000 square feet alongside inventoried cultural resources to demonstrate historical development patterns (See the Cultural Resources element for more information about historical significance). These lots would be considered legal non-conforming today.

Wrentham's residential zoning currently limits the development of different types of housing (other than detached single-family homes). Phase I of the Master Plan, under Goal 3 in the Housing Element, outlines potential zoning amendments to allow for more diverse housing types (such as cottage clusters, accessory dwelling units, and two-family homes) in residentially zoned areas.

Map 3 – Lot Sizes near Town Center



Map 4 – Lot Sizes in Sheldonville and Wampum Corner



Open Space Preservation Development

The Town enacted the Open Space Preservation Development (OSPD) bylaw in the 1990s. The purpose of OSPD subdivisions is to allow more flexibility in the subdivision design process – flexibility is awarded when common open space is identified and preserved for public use. Wrentham’s OSPD bylaw allows for smaller lot sizes – down to 22,000 square feet – if at least 30% of the subdivision is preserved as open space. Smaller lot sizes can be accommodated because developers can install private wastewater treatment facilities rather than individual septic systems. OSPD subdivisions must be at least eight acres in size, and dwellings on newly created lots in OSPDs must be 500 feet from public rights-of-way. The eight-acre minimum qualifying size for OSPDs and the 500-ft requirement could be seen as limiting factors. Additionally, the Town has seen where some OSPD subdivisions result in large numbers of units and limited active open space opportunities. As noted in the Phase I Housing Element, refinements to the bylaw could 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, OSPDs can more effectively serve the community. Reviewing the OSPD bylaw could also help decrease the number of Approval Not Required (ANR) subdivision applications.³

Commercial & Industrial Districts

The Town’s commercial zoning districts consist of: Retail Business Districts B-1 and B-2 and Commercial-Industrial Districts C-1, C-2, and C-3. The Town adopted new zoning for the Route 1 corridor, which is discussed in more detail under “Special Planning Areas” below. These commercial and industrial districts allow a variety of non-residential uses, nearly all requiring a Special Permit from the Planning Board. More intense industrial uses, like research labs, light manufacturing, warehouses, or industrial office parks, are only allowed in the C-1, C-2, or C-3 zones. The C-1, C-2, and C-3 industrial zoning is largely south of Thurston Street. The area south of I-495, including the Premium Outlets, is zoned C-2 (industrial) with a smaller portion of B-2 (retail). Generally, the areas zoned for commercial and industrial uses are located along Wrentham’s major transportation arteries, including Routes 1, 140, and 1A. Green Street, Industrial Drive, and Cushing Drive areas are zoned industrial and commercial.

Natural resource protection areas

Wrentham is wholly located in an aquifer protection zone and in the headwaters of four different watersheds. The Town is also at risk of flooding events, according to the 2018 Hazard Mitigation Plan. As such, it is critically important that development is done in a sustainable and eco-friendly manner. The Town has adopted an Aquifer Protection District and Floodplain District to regulate development near water resources. The Town also has a Watershed Protection Overlay, which is administered with the Conservation Commission. (See the Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources chapter for more information)

During Phase I of the Master Plan, concern over clear cutting of trees as development occurs arose. The Town could consider adding tree protection bylaws, in addition to these water protection provisions, to the zoning code to help identify and protect significant trees.

Special Planning Areas

The Town has targeted specific areas for zoning reform projects. Work in Downtown Wrentham and along Route 1 has recently been completed. Zoning amendments to address emerging planning issues, like expanded housing options and changing retail and service uses, have also been adopted in recent years.

³ An “Approval Not Required” project is a type of subdivision that does not require a formal review process by the Planning Board. Generally, all lots shown on an ANR plan must have frontage on an existing public way, except in the case of land transfers between properties. For more information, see: <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/07/rn/anrhandbook.pdf>

Downtown Wrentham

In 2018, the Town worked with MAPC to update the zoning in downtown Wrentham to allow for walkable, mixed-use development that would provide additional governmental, spiritual, service, residential, and social services for the community. A significant portion of the Village Zone area includes the former Crosby Valve/Tyco site – approximately 50 acres adjacent to the historic downtown strip along South Street. This area is currently vacant and presents an opportunity for redevelopment to continue the street grid to expand the historic downtown. The new zoning district contains two sub-districts – VZ-A and VZ-B. VZ-A includes the historic downtown and is generally 2.5 to 3-story buildings from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Pedestrian-scale retail frontages line South Street, with sidewalks connecting the businesses, homes, Town Hall, and places of worship. Zoning is intended to preserve the existing buildings and uses. In VZ-A, new single-family detached homes are prohibited, while other housing types are technically allowed but additional requirements may make housing development actually challenging to achieve. Shopping centers or complexes are also prohibited. VZ-B encompasses the former Crosby Valve/Tyco site. Mixed-use development, rather than solely residential or solely commercial, is encouraged for this area. A future land use diagram for VZ-B recommends three subareas to help guide redevelopment – the Mixed-Use Extension of South Street, the Compact Residential/Mixed-Use area, and the Compact Residential Buffer. (See more in the Future Land Use section). Dimensional standards allow for smaller lot sizes and setbacks and increased lot coverage. A minimum residential density of 5 units per acre is also included. Design standards address building orientation, materials and appearance, landscaping and sidewalk amenities, pedestrian connectivity, bike parking, and sustainable design measures. Historic structures are intended to be preserved and renovated; however, no coordination with the Historical Commission is noted.

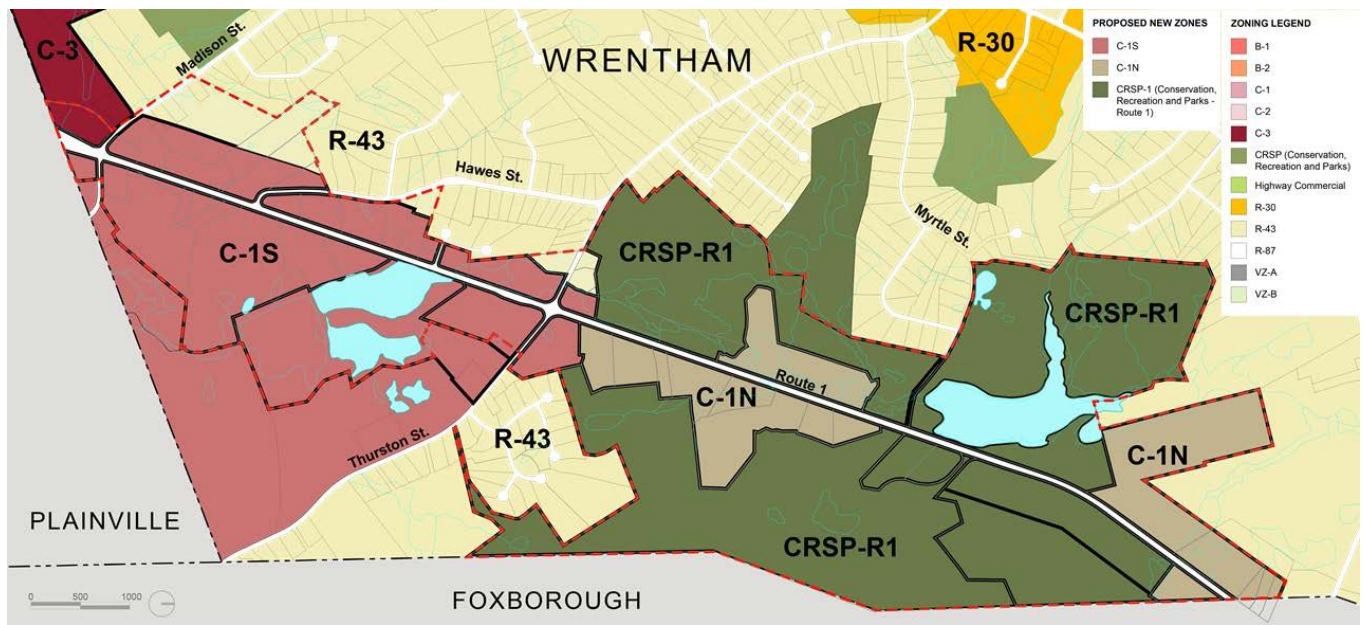
Commercial Route 1

The Town undertook a land use and transportation study of the Route 1 corridor in 2018. The study included recommendations for transportation improvements including adding dedicated turn lanes, landscaped center medians, outside curbing, phased signalization, and separated bicycle accommodations parallel to Route 1. The study also recommended improvements to access management and transit service opportunities. Zoning changes were identified as an opportunity to accommodate desired development, expand commercial opportunities to increase the Town's tax base, and develop a cohesive land use plan for the corridor.

The Route 1 corridor is unique because there are significant natural resources – wetlands, ponds, forests, and open space – that should be protected. The corridor also has room for aesthetic improvement and the potential of becoming an employment center for residents. During the corridor planning process, residents voiced a strong desire for more commercial uses, like offices, retail, hotels, and entertainment.

In 2019, the Town adopted the Route 1 zoning district to implement these recommendations. The new zoning district divides a portion of Route 1 into three sub-districts. C-1N, the Route 1 North Zoning District, encourages uses that are compatible with the adjacent natural resources. C-1S, the Route 1 South Zoning District, allows a mix of office, entertainment, hospitality, retail, and commercial services. CRSP-R1, the Conservation, Recreation, School, and Park district allows public and institutional uses. Dimensional standards for the C-1N and C-1S districts are more flexible, allowing up to five and six story buildings, respectively. Design standards are included in the new zoning district that promote traditional New England Village style for commercial uses; this architectural requirement may be a barrier to new development and be difficult to interpret. If refinements to the district are considered, removing these architectural requirements could be reconsidered. Front yard setbacks are large – 50 feet – resulting in the continued auto-oriented focus along the corridor. Vehicular access requirements work to manage access along the corridor. Map 5 shows the Route 1 district.

Map 5 - Route 1 Zoning District



Recent zoning amendments

In recent years, the Town has considered and adopted the following amendments, in addition to the Village Zone and Route 1 zoning efforts, to the Zoning Bylaw:

- Allowed accessory dwelling units in residential and Village Zone districts by Special Permit
- Clarified the definition and use allowances for brew pubs, breweries, microbreweries, and nano-breweries
- Revised the requirements for senior living communities to include more flexibility in community design, offer incentives for public amenities, and clarify definitions
- Minor amendments for non-criminal and sign penalties
- Miscellaneous changes to definitions and dimensional regulations

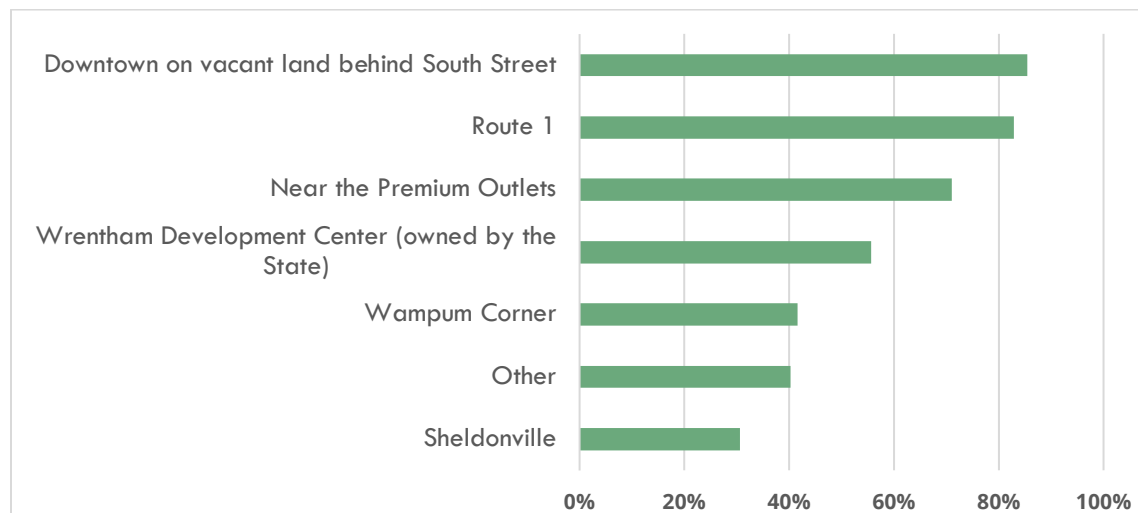
Future Land Use

A Future Land Use map can help manage growth and change in development patterns for the Town. The Future Land Use map can also be a useful tool for public infrastructure and service planning. For example, transportation improvements like sidewalk installations or safety improvements can be prioritized to areas where more people are likely to live, work, and visit. Water and sewer improvements can be targeted at areas to support future growth.

The Future Land Use map may be consistent with the current zoning, or it can show opportunities for the zoning to be refined in the future (through special planning projects like neighborhood plans, corridor plans, or other targeted efforts). A Phase I survey question asked respondents where new growth should be directed (see Figure 3). Over 80% said that new growth should occur downtown on the vacant land behind South Street. Over 80% also saw Route 1 as an opportunity for attracting new growth. Around 70% of respondents want to see more growth occur near the Premium Outlets, and around 50% of respondents would like to see growth at the Wrentham Developmental Center, which is owned by the State. During Phase II, a townwide survey found that 80% of respondents still generally agree with

focusing growth in these areas. The survey findings are consistent with the recent planning efforts at the Town, including the Village Zone zoning reform for downtown and Route 1 corridor study and updated zoning district.

Figure 3 – Phase I Survey Finding – Where Should Future Growth Occur in Wrentham?

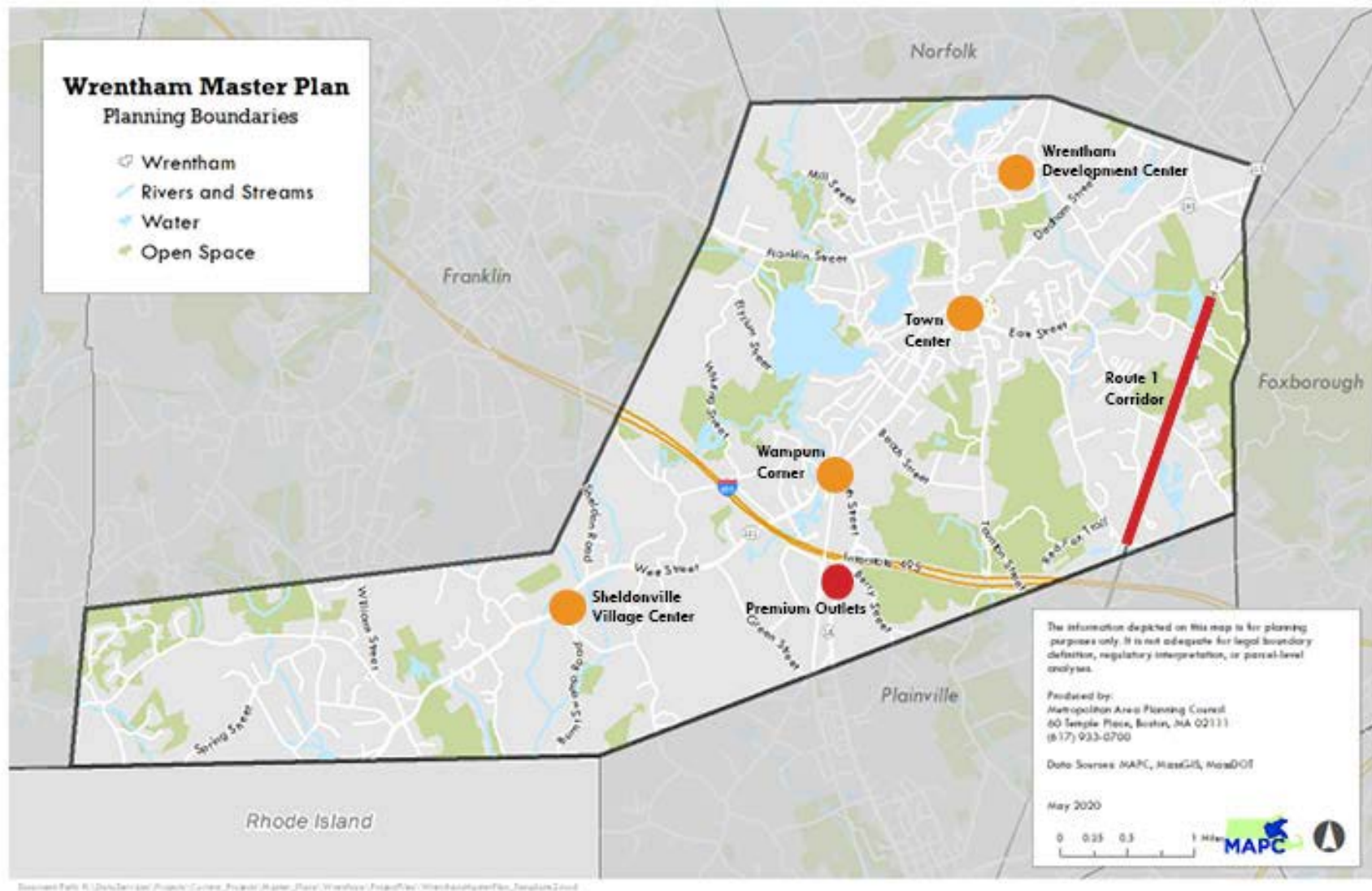


Planning for growth in village centers

Wrentham, like many places across New England, first adopted zoning that emphasized separation of land uses. However, historical development patterns naturally included gathering spots where residential and commercial uses co-existed. In Wrentham, the village centers of Downtown, Wampum Corner, and Sheldonville are most evident examples of this pattern. With the opening of the Premium Outlets in 1997, a new commercial center emerged and serves as an opportunity to accommodate future growth. Concentrating growth in existing village centers and discouraging subdivision of Wrentham's agriculture and rural properties can help preserve the community's rural landscapes while increasing the density and walkability of previously developed areas.

Leveraging the Town's recent work to update and refine zoning in key areas can further achieve goals to create more compact, walkable areas and expand transportation options. Strategically promoting growth and development in village centers could also complement targeted open space planning and result in more acres being permanently protected in Wrentham. Map 6 highlights the three existing village centers – Downtown, Wampum Corner, and Sheldonville. The map also identifies the Wrentham Developmental Center as a village center, as there is an opportunity for additional planning and growth in that area. The Town's two primary commercial centers, Premium Outlets and the Route 1 corridor, are also shown. These six areas represent opportunities for additional planning and future land use analysis to help guide new developments. The centers are discussed in more detail below.

Map 6 – Future Land Use: Special Planning Areas



Downtown Wrentham

Downtown Wrentham, surrounding the Town Common, has been a gathering place for Wrentham residents since colonial settlement in the 1600s. The area became thickly settled, with small businesses and residences interspersing around civic and institutional uses. In the late-20th century, due to Wrentham's 1960 zoning bylaw and modern-day requirements for septic systems, compact, denser developments in downtown were no longer permissible. Growth was pushed out into the outlying areas of Wrentham, resulting in the loss of rural and agricultural lands. Public infrastructure like roads, water service from community wells, schools, and parks, had to be expanded to serve the sprawling development patterns, which decreases efficiency in service. In 2013, the Town was unsuccessful in pursuing the installation of smart wastewater treatment facilities to support public sewer in both downtown and near the Premium Outlets. For downtown especially, public sewer can better support additional commercial growth and more compact housing options.

In 2018, as part of the Village Zone district, the Town prepared Figure 4, a Future Land Use diagram to help guide development in the VZ-A and VZ-B sub-districts. The diagram helps achieve the following goals:

- Preserve and strengthen the Village Center
- Provide flexibility for new development, while concentrating additional commercial and a mix of uses near the existing Downtown
- Provide new housing options that are often more affordable, like townhouses or smaller multifamily homes
- Transition to less dense residential uses further from Downtown
- Discourage retail uses in the Compact Residential buffer area

Uses are generally anticipated to be developed as follows:

- Compact Residential Buffer – 100% residential
- Compact Residential/Mixed Use Area – up to 70% residential
- Mixed-Use extension of South Street – at least 40% commercial, in similar character to the existing historic design

While the Village Zone district was adopted very recently, there are opportunities to refine the regulations and uses to ensure new development aligns with community desires. The Phase II survey found that 79% of respondents want to see pedestrian-friendly retail, restaurant, and office space downtown. 68% of respondents want to see mixed-use development. Less than 15% want to see auto-oriented developments like those in other parts of town. Many communities have found that incorporated form-based codes can be an effective way to promote pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use developments in targeted areas, like downtown Wrentham.

The future of downtown Wrentham has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Small businesses have experienced decreased revenues and supply and labor shortages. The Town completed a [Local Rapid Recovery Plan](#) (LRRP) to better understand and address impacts of Covid-19 on downtown. Considering how to implement the strategies in the LRRP, when reviewing broader zoning and planning efforts, will help ensure downtown is viable as retail, office, and commercial trends are changing and evolving because of the pandemic.

Figure 4 – Village Zone Future Land Use, Downtown Wrentham



Premium Outlets

In 1997, the Premium Outlets opened adjacent to the I-495 interstate exchange. This established a new commercial center in Wrentham; however, from conversations with residents, the area seems to attract visitors more than Wrentham locals. The area surrounding the Outlets is well connected to existing transportation networks and could benefit from subarea planning efforts to identify how future growth could provide more local benefits to residents. Additionally, the location could be ideal for moderate-density multi-family housing, given the close proximity to retail and food services and job opportunities. The Phase II survey found that 59% of respondents would like to see more pedestrian-friendly retail, restaurant, and office uses in this area, including mixed-use development. 81% of respondents believe this area is still appropriate for auto-oriented uses, both smaller-scale and larger-scale businesses.

Wrentham Developmental Center

The campus surrounding the Wrentham Developmental Center and State School is designated as a National Historic District. The campus contains a significant amount of open space among the buildings, many of which are architecturally interesting brick structures that are vacant or underused. In the periphery of the campus, community events such as the Crackerbarrel Fair, Dog Show, and sporting events like high school cross country meets, soccer games, and baseball games attract numerous visitors. The area is served by its own wastewater treatment facility, and over the years, as the State has collapsed and expanded uses for the various facilities, new businesses and organizations have opened in the area. Because of the center's proximity to downtown and availability of wastewater infrastructure, this area could be a key opportunity for redevelopment in the future. The Phase II survey found that residents continue to see this area as an opportunity for growth. Some respondents have innovative ideas for the area – for example, one respondent said, "Every time I walk there, I envision the building[s] being utilized for artists, housing, [and students]."

The Town did rezone a portion of this area from residential to Conservation, Recreation, Schools, and Parks (CSRP) to guide future land uses. In 2008, about 80 acres of the CSRP area was turned into the Rice Complex, an expansive recreation and athletic complex. Given the size of the area and the number of historic resources, the Town could benefit from a visioning and subarea planning effort, undertaken ideally in partnership with the State and other stakeholders, to continue to refine the future of this key area. Being a designated historical site, funding opportunities may be available to help cover long-range planning efforts. Historic preservation tax credits or other programs may incentivize private investors and help offset redevelopment costs.

Sheldonville and Wampum Corner

Wampum Corner and Sheldonville are two historic village centers in Wrentham that have long consisted of residences and neighborhood services. Wampum Corner is centered on the junction of Route 1A and Route 121, while Sheldonville is situated further southwest on Route 121. While the limitations of on-site septic prevent development patterns like those originally seen in the area, these village centers do provide opportunities to create rural community cohesion. The clusters of historic resources in both of these centers also provides an opportunity to tie subarea planning to historic preservation planning (see the Cultural Resources element for more information).

Following the 2004 Wrentham Master plan adoption, a subarea planning effort was focused on Wampum Corner. The planning initiative considered options for the reuse of the former Marra property (675 South Street); evaluation of housing and infrastructure along the corridor; and a conceptual subarea plan for the corridor that built on the 2004 Master Plan and 2005 Housing Production Plan. Consultants were hired to look specifically at zoning options for the corridor, potential housing and mixed-use development opportunities, open space and pedestrian improvements, and infrastructure limitations and potential improvements, especially for traffic mitigation. This project was viewed as an opportunity to plan for increased business capacity, including expanded neighborhood commercial uses like a grocery store,

pharmacy, or small office space. In the end, the Wampum Corner subarea plan resulted in minimal changes to the zoning bylaw related to low- to moderate-density housing. Since it has been over ten years since this effort was undertaken, the Town could revisit this planning effort and conduct a new planning process to hear from residents and identify zoning amendments and other public improvements.

Economic Development Growth

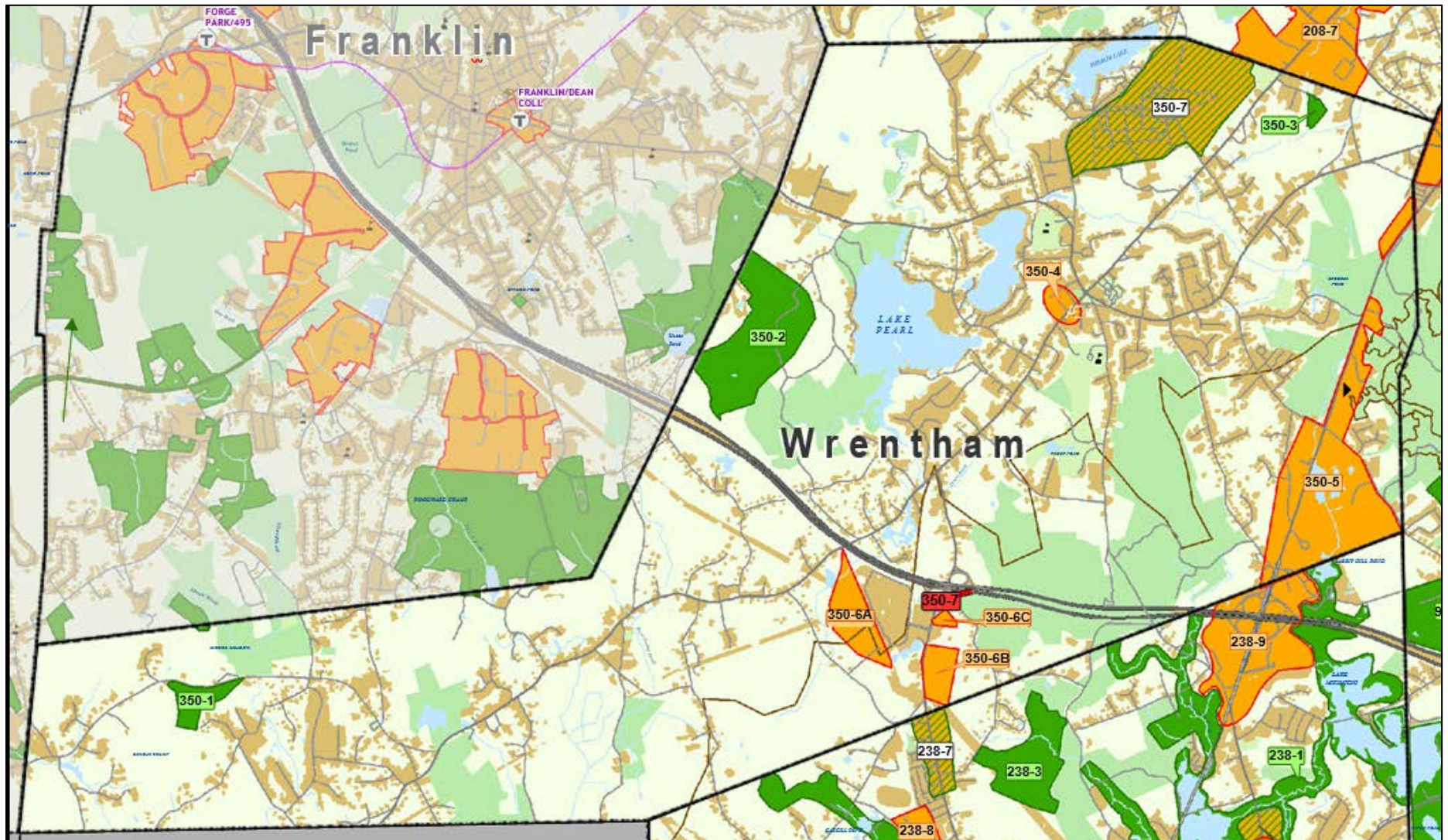
Beyond the existing village centers, where ideally both housing and economic development opportunities can develop, Wrentham has key areas for existing and new businesses to grow and expand. Concentrating employment opportunities in key locations can create nodes of activity, where businesses can support one another, and the Town can efficiently provide infrastructure and transportation services. Wrentham worked with the 495/MetroWest Corridor Partnership, along with five regional planning agencies, a regional economic development organization, and a non-profit environmental organization in 2012 to identify Priority Development Areas and Priority Preservation Areas ([read full report here](#)). These areas are important economic assets for Wrentham and provide opportunities for improvement in zoning and permitting processes. These areas are also opportunities to evaluate and focus infrastructure improvements to support existing and new economic activities. Map 7 below, along with Figure 5, highlight the priority areas in Wrentham. Notable centers include the Premium Outlets area, Route 1 corridor, downtown, and Wrentham Developmental Center.

Figure 5 – Table of Priority Area Locations

ID	Name	Priority Type
350-1	Cooks Parcel	Preservation
350-2	Lorusso Quarry	Preservation
350-3	Cushing Industrial Park Plaza	Preservation
350-4	Downtown Wrentham	Development
350-5	Route 1 Corridor	Development
350-6A	Simeone Property	Development
350-6B	South Street Neighborhood Trust	Development
350-6C	Wrentham Crossing	Development
350-7	Wrentham Developmental Center	Preservation/Development
350-7	SLIP Ramp	Significant Transportation Investment Corridor

Source: [495/MetroWest Development Compact Plan](#), 2012

Map 7 – Priority Development and Preservation Base Map



Source: [495/MetroWest Development Compact Plan](#), 2012

Ensuring the zoning bylaw reflects the community vision

As noted in the “Zoning” section, the Town has made amendments to the Zoning Bylaw over the years to address emerging planning issues and market changes, such as construction technologies, design trends, and community preferences. In addition to focused planning efforts in key areas suitable for new growth, revisiting design guidelines and dimensional standards can help achieve community-wide goals. Findings from both the Phase I and Phase II surveys and interviews and focus groups with Town residents and business owners note that having a more walkable and bike-friendly Wrentham is desired. The existing zoning bylaw includes large setbacks and buffers that may conflict with these community goals. Having limited guidelines for site design, like building orientation and parking location, can also work against goals to create walkable, connected communities. Reviewing the lot size requirements for different uses, especially in key areas that have traditionally been more compact and walkable, can help achieve community goals for walkability and expanded housing options. For example, attached single-family homes are required to have twice the minimum lot size as detached single-family homes. Triple-family homes are required to have three times the minimum lot size. These regulations can be prohibitive to expanded housing options and contribute to sprawling housing development patterns that are more auto oriented.

Rural Preservation Techniques

Outside of Wrentham’s village centers, rural areas, including a few working farms, and permanently protected open space dominate the landscape (see the Open Space element for more information). As development pressures ensue, the rural areas in the outlying areas of Wrentham are at risk of being subdivided and converted into estates on large lots. Other communities across New England and nationwide have employed rural preservation techniques, like Transfer of Development Rights programs and conservation easements, to help protect rural and natural resources from sprawling residential development. Using these techniques can also help implement the goals of Wrentham’s Open Space and Recreation Plan and the Green Communities program. Discouraging sprawling development is also fiscally responsible, as the Town can more efficiently provide public services and infrastructure to areas with more compact developments. The Town could also refine the existing Open Space Preservation Development bylaw to make it more appealing to property owners or potential developers.

Changes in State Law: MBTA Communities

In 2021, the State added a new section (3A) to M.G.L. c. 40A (the Zoning Act) as part of an economic development bill to promote more housing choices near transit. The new section requires that MBTA communities have at least one zoning district of reasonable size that permits multi-family housing by-right. Other zoning criteria in the statute include a minimum gross density of 15 units per acre; located no more than ½ mile from a commuter rail station, subway station, ferry terminal, or bus station, as applicable; housing must not have age restrictions; and housing must be suitable for families with children. Wrentham is designated an MBTA community under the new bill. Section 3A notes that failure to comply with new requirements will make communities ineligible for funds from the Housing Choice Initiative program, Local Capital Projects Fund, and MassWorks infrastructure program.

The Massachusetts Department of Community Development (DHCD) is working with MBTA and MassDOT to prepare guidelines for how the new section of state law will be implemented. [Draft guidelines](#) were released in December 2021 and are available for review through March 31, 2022. Final guidelines will be issued in summer 2022.

Under the draft guidelines, MBTA communities have been organized into four different types, based on transit service. Wrentham is categorized as an “MBTA Adjacent” community, due to the lack of transit stations in or near Wrentham (less than ½ mile). MBTA Adjacent communities are required to have a zoning district that allows multi-family by-right in an area that is at least 50 acres in size and contiguous.

Since MBTA Adjacent communities are not within ½ mile of transit stations, the draft guidelines advise that the multi-family zoning district should be located “in an area with reasonable access to a transit station based on existing street patterns, pedestrian connections, and bicycle lanes, or in an area that otherwise is consistent with the Commonwealth’s [sustainable development principles](#) – for example, near an existing downtown or village center, near an RTA bus stop or line, or in a location with existing under-utilized facilities that can be redeveloped into new multi-family housing.” The zoning district’s multi-family unit capacity must be equal to or greater than 10% of the town’s total housing stock. In Wrentham, 10% of the housing stock is 462 (4,620 total housing units exist in Wrentham, according to DHCD and based on 2020 Decennial Census data). Guidelines include how to demonstrate unit capacity. It is important to note that Section 3A and draft guidelines do not require communities to build multi-family units. The intent is to ensure local regulations permit multi-family development near transit, should an application be made.

The MTBA Communities guidance recognizes that many communities do not currently have a multi-family district of reasonable size that meets the requirements of Section 3A. The draft guidance outlines a process for interim compliance. Communities can create an action plan and timeline for work associated with the creation of a conforming multi-family district. For MBTA adjacent communities, the action plan should be submitted by December 31, 2022, and approved by DHCD by July 1, 2023. The action plan must be implemented and result in adoption of a zoning amendment by December 31, 2024.

More information on this evolving guidance is available here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/multi-family-zoning-requirement-for-mbta-communities#review-the-draft-guidelines->.

Community Engagement

The Land Use existing conditions report was informed by interviews with Town staff and officials, conversations during focus groups, and feedback received at community forums. Surveys conducted as part of Phase I, in addition to the Phase II survey informed the analysis.

The Phase II Community Survey conducted in November-December 2021, included several questions focused on land use and zoning.

Survey respondents were asked to choose up to 5 responses with the results below, answering: **Where do you want to see different development types?**

