

2018



Norfolk Townwide Economic Development Plan

Prepared for the Town of Norfolk by the
Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Image Credit: Doug

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Town of Norfolk

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INTRODUCTION

With funding through the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program, MAPC has worked over the past year to develop a Townwide Economic Development Strategy (TEDS) for the Town of Norfolk. This strategy builds upon the 1992 Master Plan, 2002 Growth Management Plan, 2004 Community Development Vision, and 2007 Norfolk Master Plan which all provide the town guidance on improving economic conditions in town. The TEDS, as developed by MAPC, includes an update of the town's demographic profile as relevant to economic development, an assessment of the towns existing businesses, recaps of a community visioning and a business advisory event, and recommendations for the town to use in creating new economic development opportunities.

Norfolk is located in the Southwest Advisory Planning Committee subregion of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. As of 2015 the town of Norfolk had a population of approximately 12,000 people, up from 9,245 in 2006. Norfolk is a prosperous community with 90% of town residents having attained a High School degree or higher and 65% of town households making more than \$100,000 per year. Additionally, 95% of town residents are home owners.

The town of Norfolk has expressed an interest in encouraging new commercial / industrial development to expand the town's tax base. The 2007 Master Plan cites that 94% of the town's tax revenue was generated from residential property taxes. The Master Plan set a target goal of reducing that number to 85% by 2017, however the most recent data for the town of Norfolk indicate that the Town is still overwhelmingly reliant on residential property taxes with 92% of tax revenue being generated from that residential property.

There are two main districts that the town is interested in developing for commercial and industrial purposes which are the focus of this report. They are the Town Center and the Rt 1A / 115 crossroads. Previous plans have called for the town to focus its economic development strategy on both of these areas with a continuous emphasis on developing a mixed use downtown district similar to more traditional New England style Main Street.

Previous plans have stated that challenges to business attraction include a lack of infrastructure (sewer and stormwater management facilities), lack of anchor business to distinguish the area from other commercial centers, cumbersome permitting, and a weak consumer market. Since the 2007 Master Plan was written the town has installed a wastewater treatment system for the parcels along Liberty Lane with capacity to handle flow from new developments. The system has a daily capacity of 30,000 gallons. Business attraction through marketing, tax incentives, and streamlined permitting processes have also been identified as potential ways to encourage commercial development in town.

A recent development on the former "moonscape" site, just south of the town hall, illustrates the development community's reluctance to invest in commercial real estate. Zoned for mixed use residential and commercial development, the developers opted out of providing commercial space claiming the local commercial market was not strong enough to warrant the development. The existing zoning requirements for ground floor commercial space were skirted through a 40b application.

INTRODUCTION

While Norfolk does have a stop on the commuter line providing residents easy access to Boston it is not located near any major highways. The town is intersected by Rt 115 and Rt 1A. Rt 115 provides quick access to neighboring Foxborough and Gillette Stadium. Despite not being on a major highway, in recent years Norfolk has attracted a 200,000 sq ft furniture assembly business (Jofran) and a large indoor recreation facility (ForeKicks). Both of these businesses are located in the South East C1 district along Route 115.

Balancing the natural and rural character of the town with new development has been identified as a priority for the community. The town is home to a large protected wildlife sanctuary operated by the Audubon Society as well as wetlands and tributaries of the Charles River.

SUMMARY OF EXISTING PLANS

Norfolk has undertaken a number of planning processes to guide the future of land use, open space and recreation, housing and economic development in town. The following is a summary of the previous plans that are relevant to the context of the TEDS.

1992 Master Plan

The 1992 Master Plan was written to inform a long term vision for the town of Norfolk. The Master Plan covers topics ranging from transportation to housing and does include an economic development section. The plan found four major economic development goals:

- Encourage development within Business/Commercial zones of Town and encourage this development to fit the retail, commercial and employment needs of the Town.
- Specific non-residential zoning districts should allow a “district” sewerage program and/or storm drainage program. This condition should allow these areas to develop 100% of their geographic areas within the current bylaw criteria for bulk and use.
- Analyze the appropriateness of mixed land uses, including institutional and apartment style residential and uses, in specific commercial/business zones which might create a demand for a variety of services and job opportunities.
- Create a real estate marketing program within Norfolk to streamline communications between private land development enterprises and municipal boards, departments and commissions.

With the following goals specific to the town center

- Inspire a village center retail shopping complex in lieu of the “moonscape” and MBTA access road
- Develop a social, cultural, aesthetically pleasing and functional Town Center, and to focus on the peripheral improvements needed to complete a functional Town Center.

2002 Growth Management Plan

The 2002 Growth Management Plan builds upon the Master Plan in the context of a growing town. The plan outlines steps for the Town of Norfolk to manage growth while maintaining the character and values of the town. As related to economic development, The Growth Management Plan includes a Growth Policy Statement with the following goals:

- Encourage the development of the Town Center in a manner that provides goods and services as well as social interaction
- Expand the tax base to ensure fiscal capacity to provide a high quality of services
- Ensure that resources are sufficient to sustain the future needs of residents and businesses

The Growth Policy Statement also emphasizes that the Town Center should develop as a traditional, pedestrian-oriented New England Town Center containing a mix of goods and services and configured to encourage social interaction. It also states that it should become more unified in function and appearance as it develops over time. The Growth Policy Statement also states that the C-1 district should continue to develop as a major commercial and industrial center.

2004 Community Development Plan – Economic Development Section

The 2004 Community Development Plan's Economic Development Section was written primarily to serve as an update to the 1992 Master Plan's Economic Development overview. The plan outlines a number of goals and objectives related to growing the town's commercial tax base and attracting new businesses. Recommendations include investments in infrastructure capacity (water, sewer, gas), streamlining regulations, attracting anchor businesses, streamlining business permitting, among others.

2007 Master Plan

The 2007 Master Plan serves the same purpose as the 1992 plan, to guide the long term planning and development for the town of Norfolk. The 2007 plan includes Community Vision Priorities, which sets four explicit value based priorities for the town. The Master Plan Committee developed the community vision outlined below utilizing input from the 2006 Citizen/Business Forums, citizen survey responses, the 2004 Community Development Plan and the 1992 Norfolk Master Plan.

- 1.** Norfolk's citizens would like its Town Center developed into a traditional, pedestrian oriented, New England village with retail, commercial services and mixed uses including housing that provides for social and cultural interaction for all age groups.
- 2.** Norfolk's citizens would like to preserve its residential, semi-rural, New England character with roadway images of farms, forests, ponds and streams.
- 3.** Norfolk's citizens would like to see full development of business/commercial districts such that Business-Commercial property values would provide a larger share of tax revenues allowing significantly less dependence on single family home tax revenues.
- 4.** Norfolk's citizens would like to ensure that its resources are sufficient to sustain the future needs of residents and businesses.

Recommendations for the 2007 plan echo those of the 1992 Master Plan, 2002 Growth Management Plan, and 2004 Community Development Plan. They include a focus on developing the town center area, continuing to attract and grow new business in the C1 and C4 districts, and improving government processes around permitting.

PLANNING PROCESS

The Townwide Economic Development Strategy for the Town of Norfolk was developed in four phases.

Phase 1: Existing Conditions Review

MAPC conducted a review of the town's economic and demographic information as an update to the 2007 Master Plan. This information is located in the Existing Conditions chapter of this report.

Phase 2: Community Visioning

On May 25th, the Town of Norfolk and MAPC presented to a community forum at the Norfolk Town Library. Approximately 50 community residents attended to discuss the creation of the Townwide Economic Development Strategy and to specifically discuss a future vision and shared goals for the town's economic development process. Documentation of the town meeting and materials can be found in the Community Visioning section of this report.

Phase 3: Business Engagement

In addition to the community event on the 25th the Town of Norfolk and MAPC hosted a business breakfast to convene local business and development stakeholders. The event included a short presentation of existing conditions in town along with a discussion of challenges facing the local business community. MAPC also conducted several stakeholder interviews over the phone prior to the business breakfast.

Phase 4: Strategic Planning and development of recommendations.

MAPC synthesized the information gained in the first three phases of the planning process into a series of discrete recommendations for the Town Center, Rt 1A / 115 business center, and for the business community at large in town.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Methodology

MAPC has access to both the Massachusetts Department of Labor ES-202 data set which catalogues aggregate data of firms and employment by industry within municipalities, as well as the privately collected InfoGroup USA data which provides individual business information regarding employment and sector. Demographic data was collected using the most recently available US Census Data. Municipal finance information was collected using the Massachusetts Municipal Databank, a product of the Division of Local Services under the Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Townwide Business Composition

As of 2015, the approximately 310 businesses in Norfolk supported close to 3,500 jobs¹. The Town of Norfolk added approximately 49 businesses and 300 employees between 2001 and 2015². The health care industry exhibited the largest percent growth due to the limited number of establishments in town prior to the opening of Pondville Medical associates. The town has a strong cluster of construction firms providing many middle income jobs, a small number of wholesale trade businesses providing very well paying jobs, and several bus and transportation companies providing many jobs at modest wages.

Both InfoGroup and ES-202 data sets show the construction sector representing an outsized percentage of businesses and employment in town. The two data sets do show some conflicting information, this is likely based on ES 202 masking some data due to the narrow geographic parameters of the data and InfoGroup reporting business addresses for the registered address of independent business operators such as general contractors or healthcare professionals who may have premises elsewhere but have their home address listed on tax records. While the ES 202 data does not include numbers for Public Administration (NAICS code 92) it is likely that the InfoGroup USA's documentation of large employees in this sector is accurate due to the prisons that operate in Norfolk.

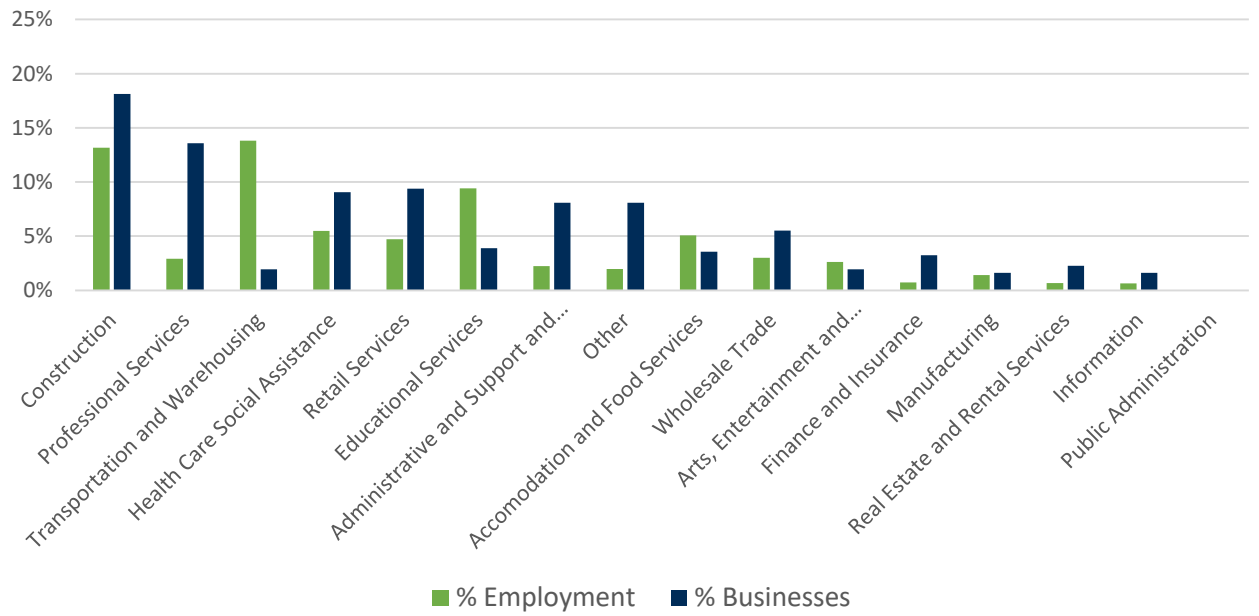
¹ Massachusetts ES 202 2015

² Ibid

Norfolk Establishments and Employment 2015

Source: ES-202

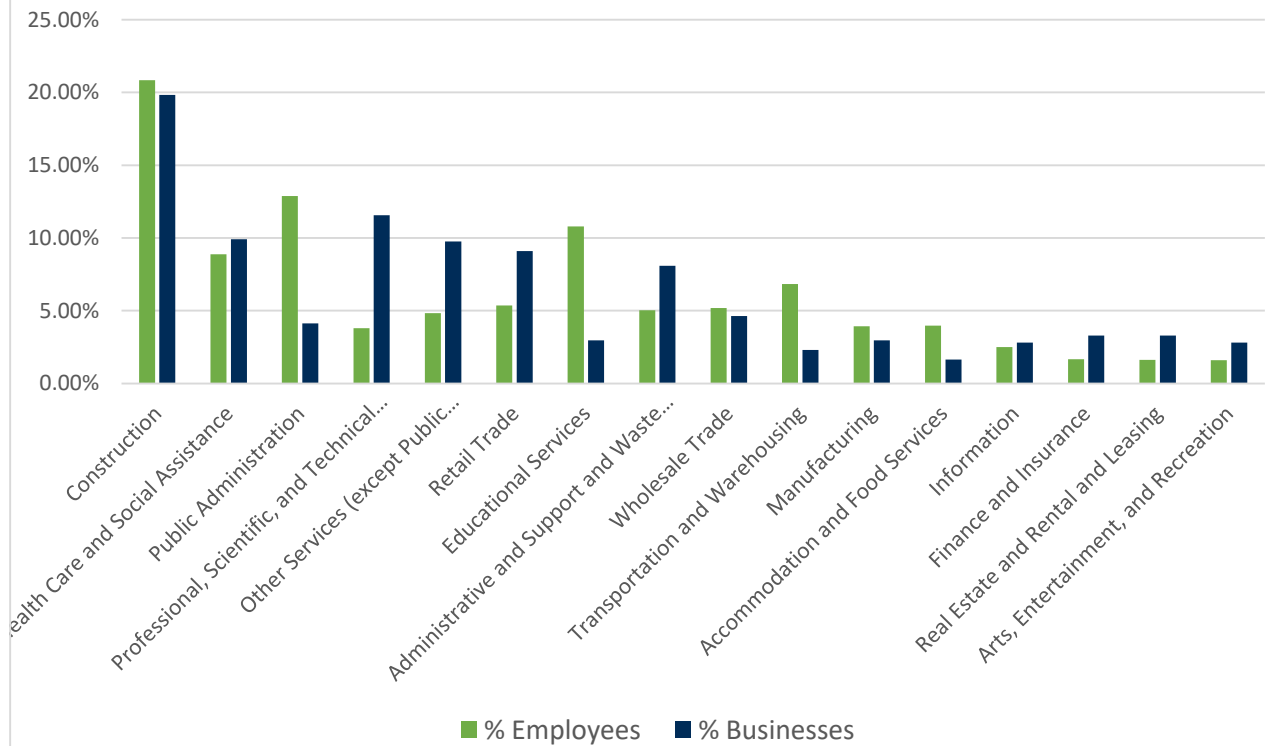
N = Employees: 3495, Businesses: 309



Norfolk Establishments and Employment 2015

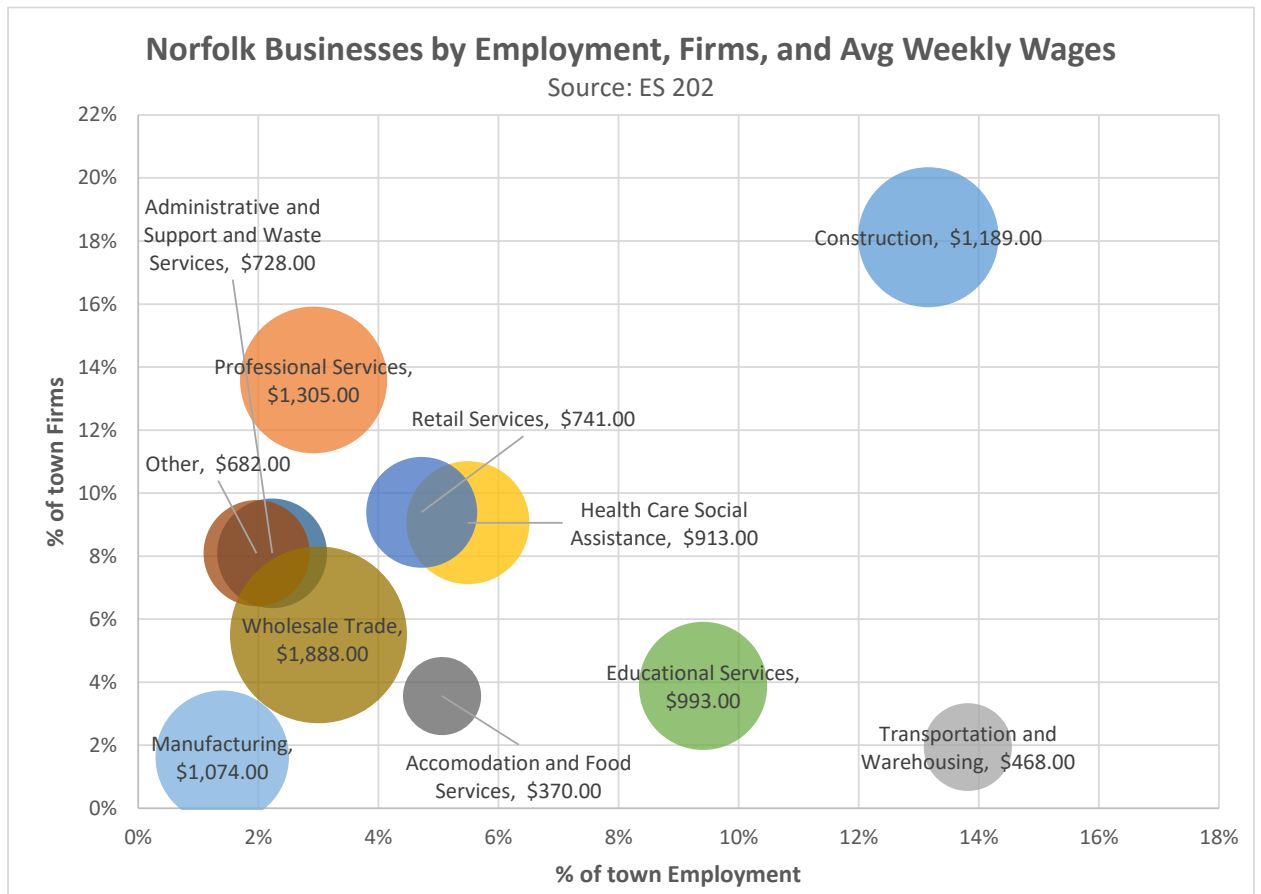
Source: InfoGroup USA

N = Employees: 4667, Establishments: 406



Wage Relation to Employment and Firms

Wages in the wholesale trade industry were the highest within the ES 202 data series. While the industry does not make up a large portion of the overall areas businesses or employees it shows very good wage opportunities. The construction industry displays very strong employment, firm numbers, and wages. Unsurprisingly professional services displays high weekly wages as well. The few transportation and warehousing firms account for significant employment in town, yet do not provide high wage job opportunities. There are two large transportation businesses in Norfolk – Holmes Bus and Kiesling. Kiesling provides special needs service opportunities and has a contract with Dean College in Franklin, Holmes Bus serves the local school systems.

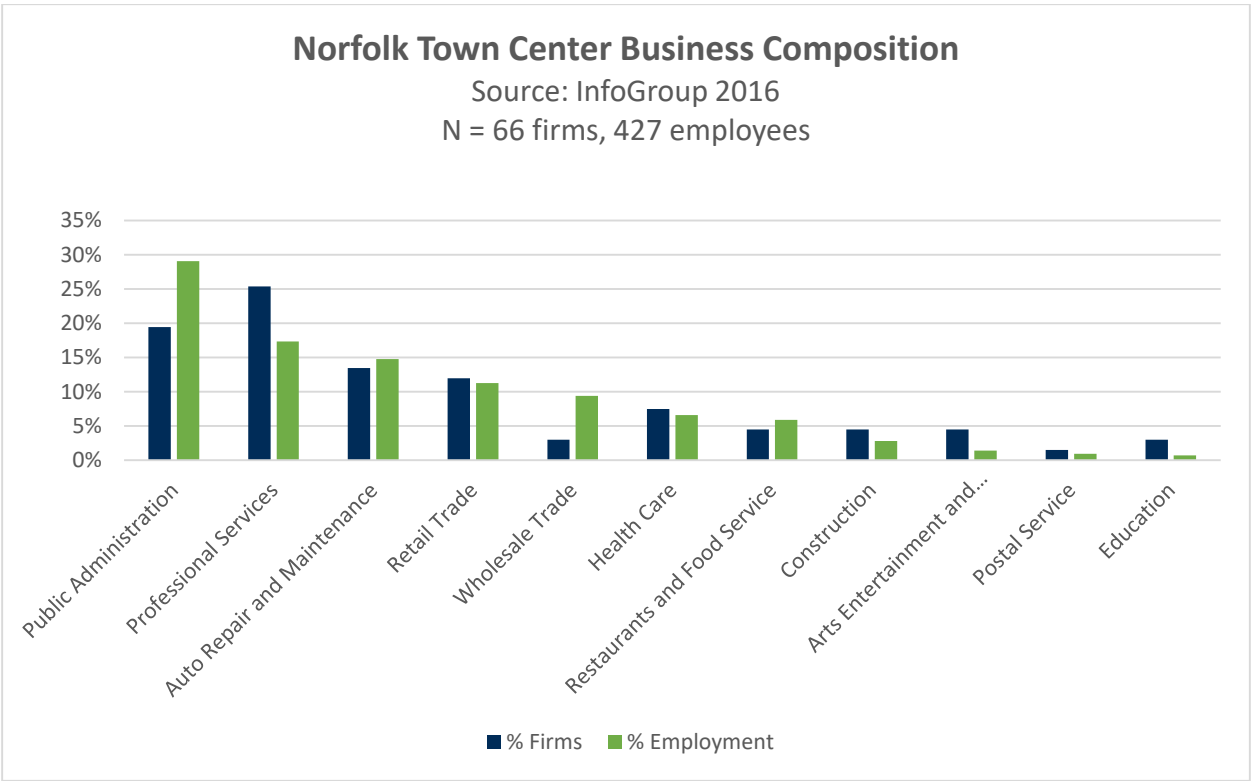


Town Center: Business Conditions

The Town Center district has approximately 54 establishments including the town’s administrative offices accounting for about 440 employees³. As the Town Center’s major employer is the town itself (about 30%) and it’s various departments, many of those 440 employees may not actually be physically present in the town center. The center also hosts a number of professional services such

³ InfoGroup 2016

as real estate brokers, accountants, and legal services. There is a small number of retail and food service establishments that serve residents and employees in the town center as well.



The town has invested in pedestrian friendly amenities in the town center such as wide sidewalks, lighting, and streetscaping. These investments provide the framework of amenities that could make for an active

mixed use town center once development arrives. The commuter rail provides easy access from the Norfolk town center to downtown Boston and sees an average of 748 inbound trips per day⁴.



Town Center: Challenges

The town of Norfolk has long identified the need to activate the lots within the Town Center B-1 district. In the 2007 Town Master plan, recommendations to activate the lots in the downtown area focused on the need for infrastructure upgrades to encourage development including stormwater and wastewater systems. Since, the town has made significant improvements in a district stormwater and wastewater system serving the undeveloped parcels on Liberty Lane, although the town center lots still lack gas infrastructure which has been identified as a hurdle to encouraging development.

In addition to lack of infrastructure, Norfolk has grappled with a lack of market incentive towards development to encourage new construction. The zoning in the town center has been written so as to allow mixed use commercial and residential development with direct streetscape frontage. The zoning limits new commercial development to 15,000 sq ft per lot, with the exception of a grocery store use which expands that limit to 50,000 sq ft per lot. This provision was included to incentivize the development of a grocery store at the lot located at 9 Liberty Lane, a four acre parcel that is the largest in the Town Center. Unfortunately, no grocery store has materialized in town, likely due to a combination of market saturation in nearby towns, low population density, limited access to major roads, and land banking by the property owner Eastern Development.

The current zoning restricts residential development to 16 bedrooms per lot, with no more than two bedrooms allowed per residential unit. These restrictions combined with a high parking requirement of

⁴ MBTA 2014

1.5 spaces per unit are likely prohibitive to development, and could be a reason why no land owners in the town center have taken advantage of the mixed use zoning residential and commercial zoning. Additionally, the restriction of two bedrooms per unit creates a de facto ban on multifamily housing which could put the Town of Norfolk in jeopardy of violating federal Fair Housing laws.

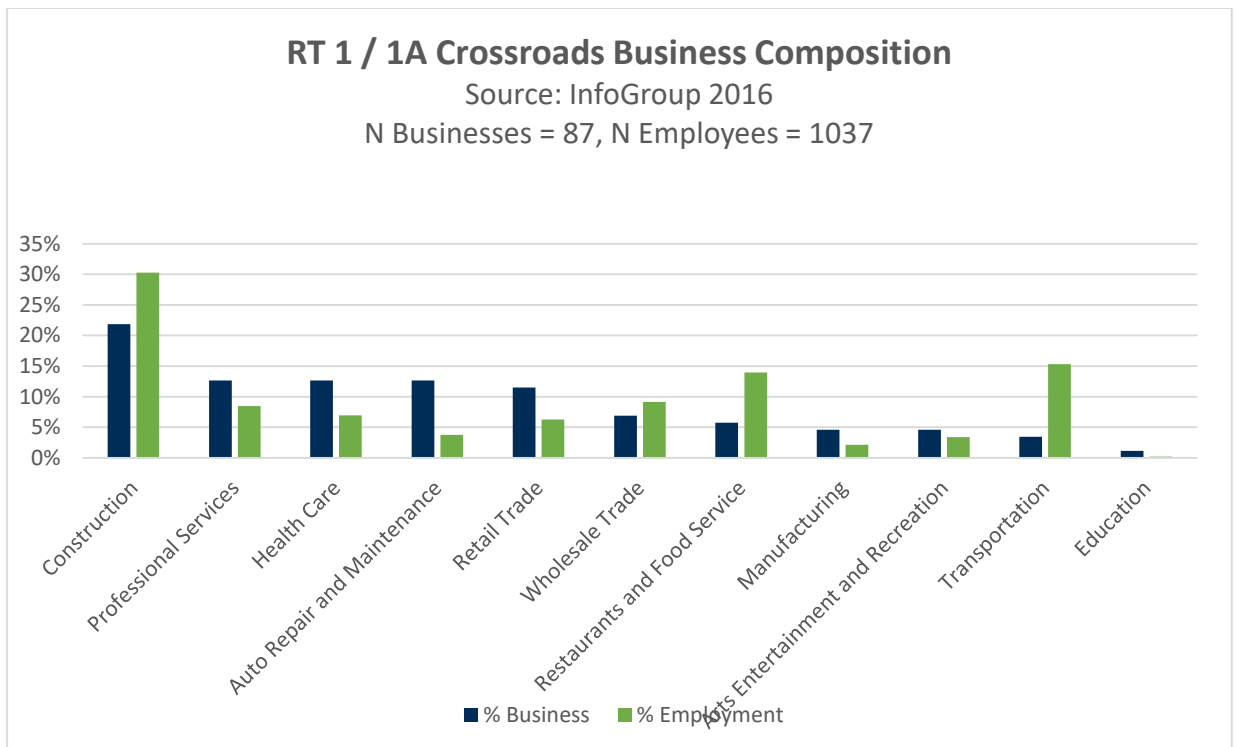
The town faces a serious chicken and egg scenario with development. As a rural village, Norfolk lacks the population density to attract new commercial development on spec in the town center. While the town center lots have been designed to support both commercial and residential development, without the residential component it is hard to incentivize commercial development.

Additionally, the town center area does not benefit from a major east west road connection linking Norfolk to population centers in Walpole and Franklin.

RT 115 / 1A: Existing Conditions

The RT 1 / 1A cross roads has been developing as a prime location for businesses serving the region with easy access to RT 1 and 495. It is home to about 90 businesses and 1000 employees⁵. The area is composed of large lot sizes that are good for staging equipment and materials and has the Shire Industrial park within its boundaries. Recent developments such as the Pondville Medical Center and the expansion of Island Lighting and Power illustrate the areas strategic location for businesses drawing from or serving a regional market. Other key businesses in this area include Fore Kicks Sports Center, Jofran Furniture, and Kiesling Transportation. The construction and transportation sectors are the dominant employers in this area, which is unsurprising given the easy access to RT 1 and 495. The restaurant and food service sector also accounts for a large share of the areas employment, likely due to large eateries like Novatos and the Horse and Carriage Saloon.

Norfolks Rt 1A / 115 Crossroads district is directly linked to Gillette Stadium and Patriot Place in Foxborough via Rt 115. As Patriot Place continues its expansion Crossroads business district may be advantageously located to absorb auxiliary uses and services to this major economic driver in the region.



Rt 1A / 115: Challenges

As stated above, the Rt 1A / 115 Crossroads area appears to be a stable and growing business district. Being located on a major road that connects the town to Walpole and Wrentham as well providing quick access to both I-95 and I-495 is attractive to the construction firms located in the area as well as the regional serving establishments such as the Pondville Medical Center and ForeKicks Recreation. A number of smaller firms have begun to locate in the area as well including a small cluster of specialty beverage establishments such as Norfolk Wine and Spirits, and the Craft Beer Cellar.

⁵ InfoGroup 2016

Over the course of several one on one conversations with businesses operating in the area, there was a general sentiment that while the town has come a long way in becoming more business friendly, some of the town's current procedures and regulations are outdated, cumbersome, and sometimes financially imposing on the business community. Businesses cited examples ranging from inconvenient regulations governing signage to costly electrical engineering reviews. There was also a general feeling that the businesses didn't know where to go in the town for assistance or information.

TOWNWIDE DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Property Assessed Value

The amount of non-residential assessed value in Norfolk has been growing slowly since 2007 when the last master plan was written. As it stands today 92% of property assessed value in Norfolk is residential with the rest being accounted for in the commercial / industrial sector. The 2007 plan set a target goal of reducing that number to 85% by 2017.

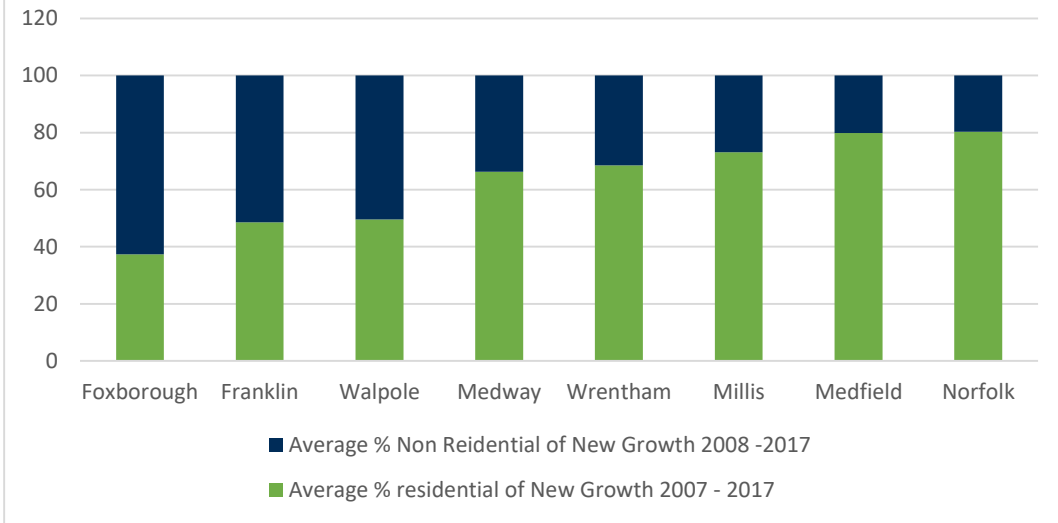
Norfolk Tax Assessed Value 2007 – 2017			
Source: Mass Municipal Data Bank			
Fiscal Year		R/O as % of Total Value	CIP as % of Total Value
2007		94.79	5.21
2008		94.34	5.66
2009		93.80	6.20
2010		93.37	6.63
2011		93.00	7.00
2012		93.02	6.98
2013		93.20	6.80
2014		93.14	6.86
2015		93.21	6.79
2016		92.70	7.30
2017		92.67	7.33

New Growth

Over the last 10 years Norfolk has added an approximate average of \$30M / year to its tax roll through new growth with 80% of that growth being residential. The communities surrounding Norfolk (Franklin, Walpole, Milis, Foxborough, Wrentham, and Medfield) all display more even distribution of new growth between commercial / industrial and residential. It is difficult to assess why the adjacent towns appear to be attracting more non-residential growth than Norfolk without further research. However, all of the adjacent towns benefit from major roads providing east west connections which may provide the necessary market connections that Norfolk lacks.

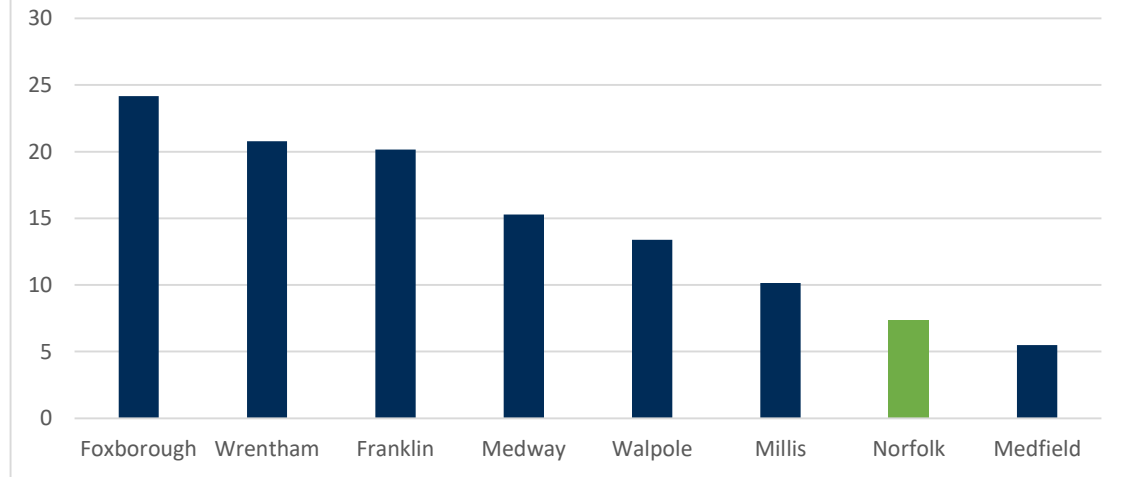
Average Growth Percentages, 2008 - 2017

Source: Mass DataBank



Percent Commercial Industrial Private Property Tax Assessed Value, 2017, Norfolk and Neighboring Towns

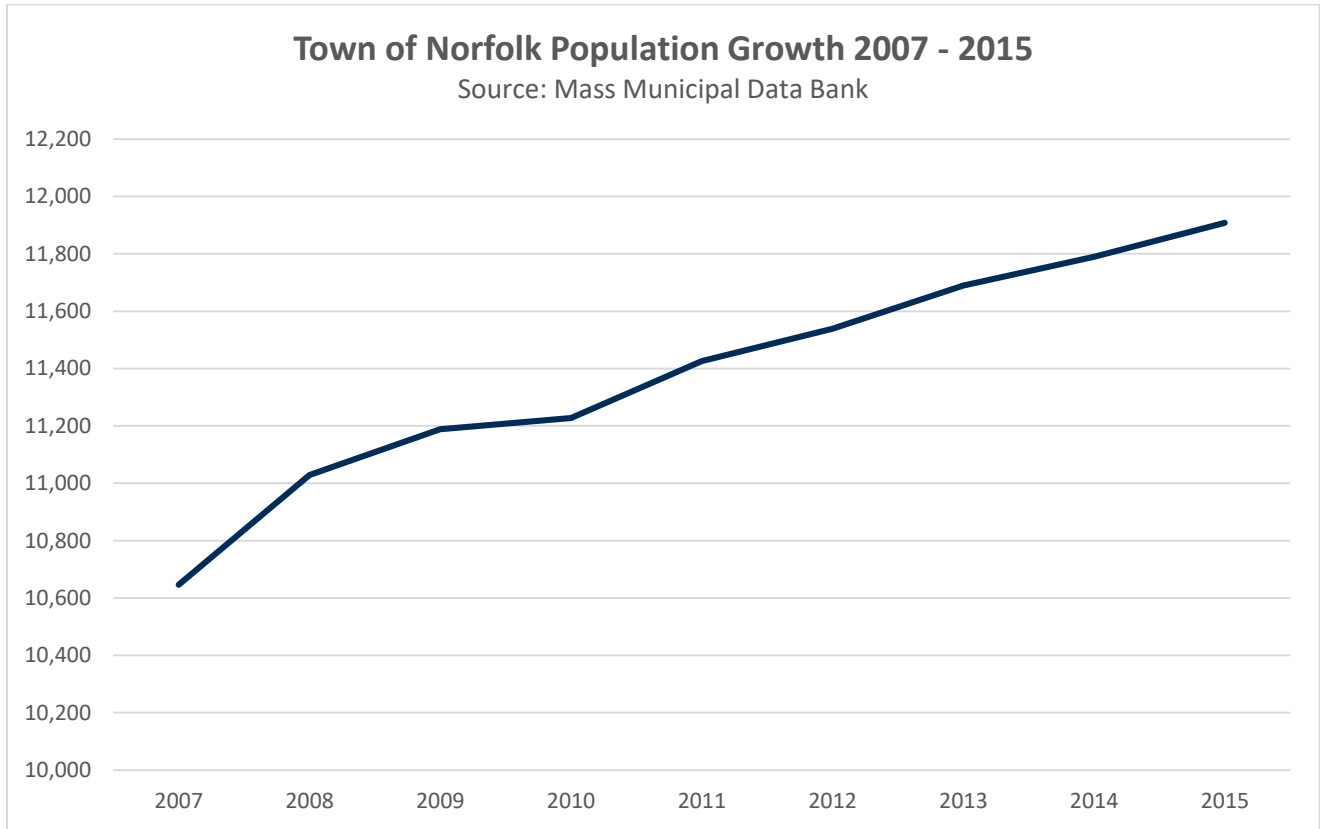
Source: Mass Municipal Data Bank



TOWNWIDE DEMOGRAPHICS

Population Increase

Norfolk's population has been growing since the 2007 Master Plan. It has experienced a 6% change in growth since 2007, slightly higher than the county's growth rate of 4% change since 2007.



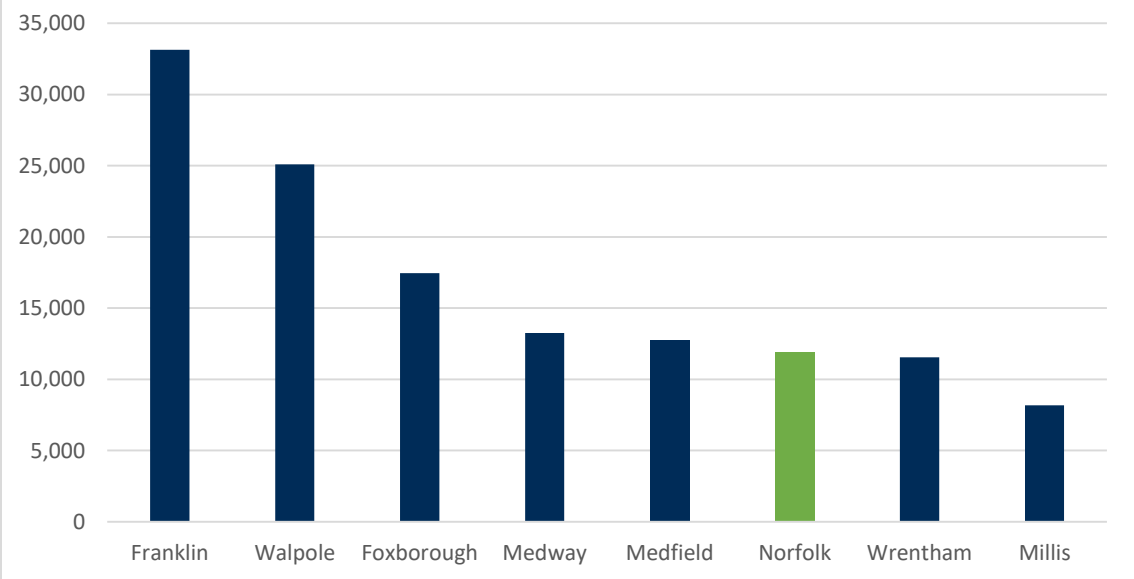
Municipal Population growth 2007 – 2015

Source: Municipal Data Bank

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Population Percent Change 2007 - 2015
Foxborough	16,298	16,347	17,087	16,865	16,981	17,087	17,257	17,399	17,456	4%
Franklin	31,381	32,148	32,079	31,635	32,213	32,374	32,581	33,011	33,147	5%
Medfield	12,266	12,275	12,274	12,024	12,124	12,219	12,313	12,412	12,718	6%
Medway	12,749	12,785	12,901	12,752	12,802	12,864	13,053	13,194	13,253	4%
Millis	7,927	7,957	8,034	7,891	7,964	7,995	8,047	8,110	8,169	4%
Norfolk	10,646	11,029	11,188	11,227	11,426	11,539	11,689	11,790	11,908	6%
Walpole	23,086	23,133	23,461	24,070	24,389	24,562	24,818	24,966	25,102	4%
Wrentham	11,116	11,133	11,224	10,955	11,038	11,118	11,268	11,434	11,548	5%

Adjacent Towns to Norfolk - Population 2015

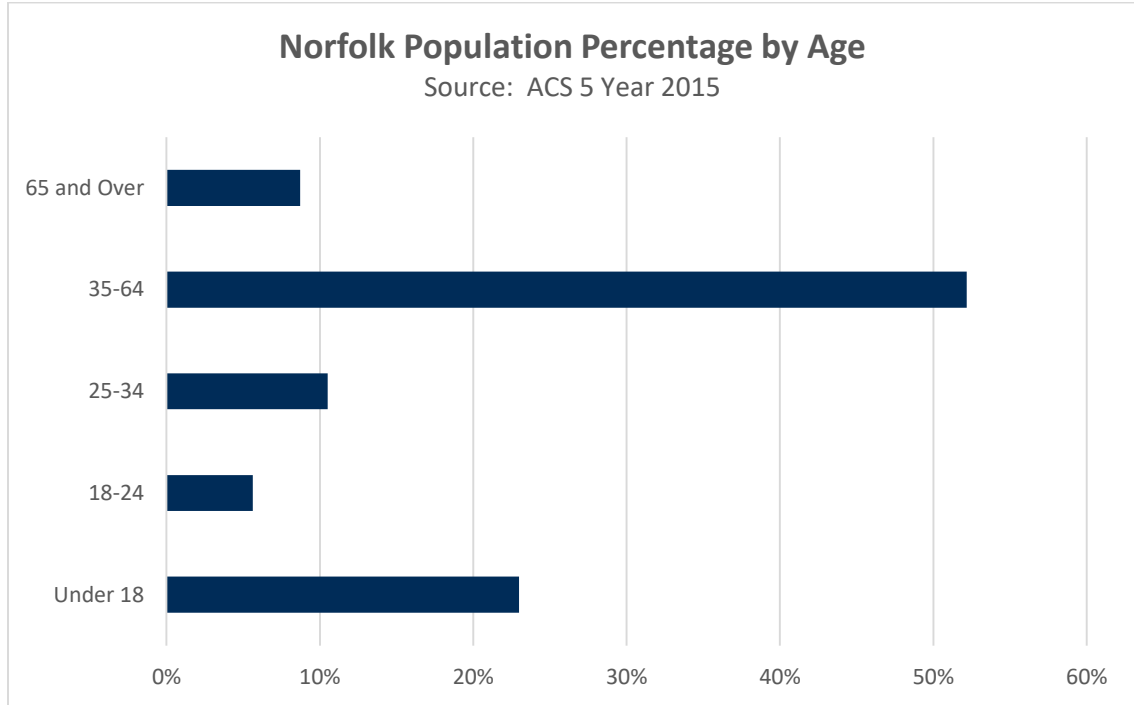
Source: Mass Municipal Database



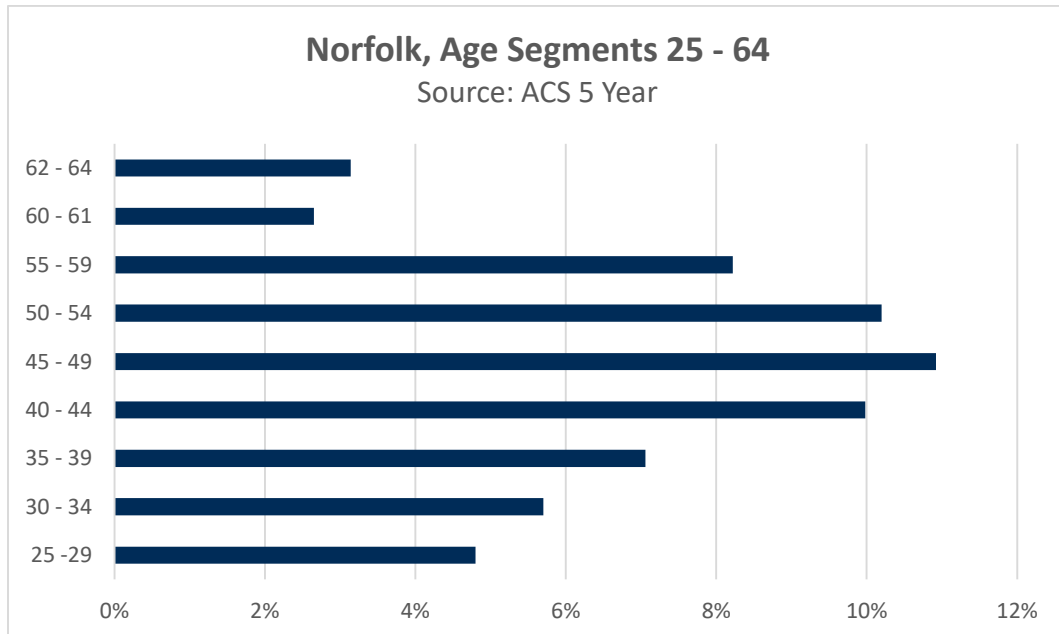
Age

The majority of Norfolk's population is in the 35-64 age group. There is also a significant number of younger people aged 18 and younger, accounting for approximately 23% of the town's population. Approximately 10% of the town's population is retirement age, 65 and over.

Within the 25 – 64 age bracket, 31% of the population is between the ages of 40 and 54.



Within the labor force age group there is a concentration of residents between the ages of 35 and 54. It is unsurprising that this age group represents a large portion of Norfolk's residents as these are likely mid-career professionals who are able to afford a home in Norfolk and have children.

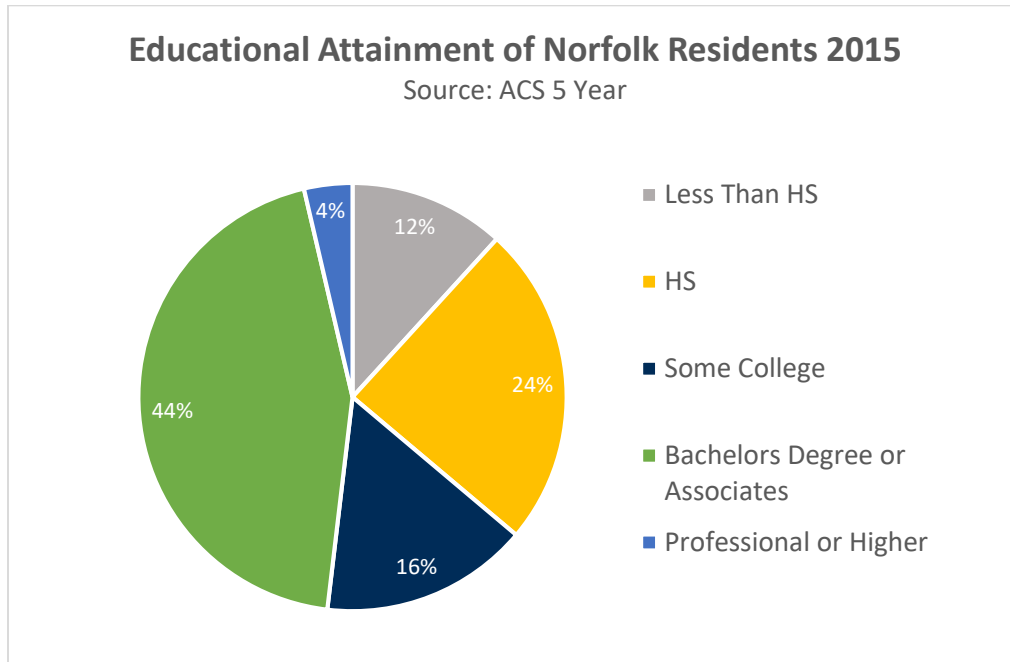


Employment / Unemployment

The approximately 5,000 residents of Norfolk within the labor force enjoy a very low unemployment rate, 2.1% in 2016. This is down from a 4.6% rate in 2006 as cited in the 2007 master plan.

Education

The population of Norfolk is very well educated with 44% of the population 25 years and older having achieved a Bachelors or Associates degree.



Household Median Income

Norfolk's household median income is quite high at \$140,278 /yr⁶, with more than 60% of households earning more than \$100,000 / year. This is substantially higher than the county's median income of \$88,262 / yr. This high income is in alignment with previous reports including the 2004 Community Vision Plan which cites median income at \$108,101, substantially higher than either the county or the state for that year.

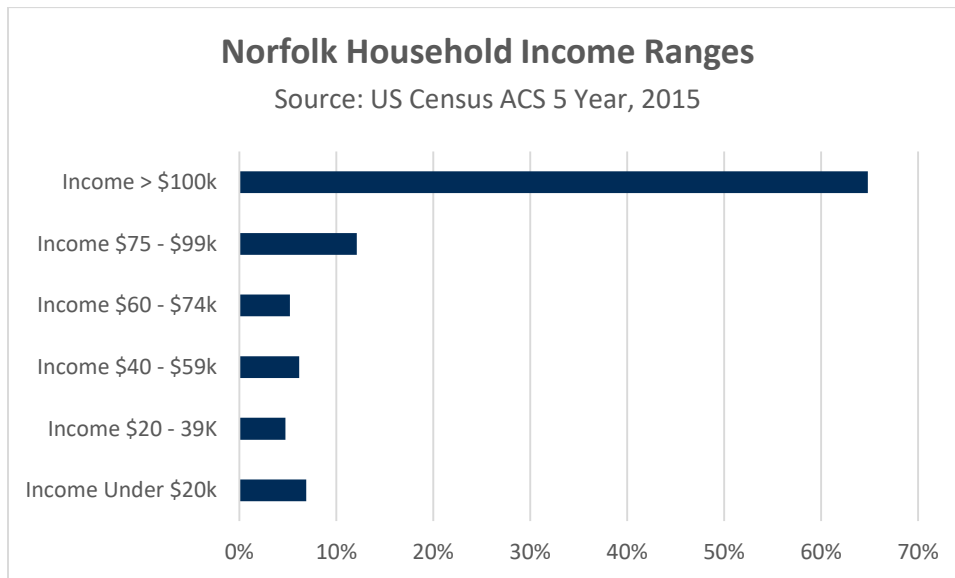
While median incomes in Norfolk are high, the cost of living in town is also quite high. The 2017 Norfolk Housing Production Plan cites that about 25% of Norfolk households are "cost burdened"⁷, meaning they pay more than 30% of their income towards housing costs.⁸ The households most impacted by cost burden are small families and elderly households.

The high incomes in Norfolk indicate a community that is likely to have disposable income. However, the small size of Norfolk may limit the amount of commercial establishments that could be supported even with high local incomes.

⁶ American Community Survey 2015, 5 Year

⁷ Norfolk Housing Production Plan 2018 -2022 pg 40.

⁸ Housing costs include rent, mortgage, insurance, property taxes and utilities



Housing Tenure

Norfolk is a town of owners with 95% of town residents owning their home⁹.

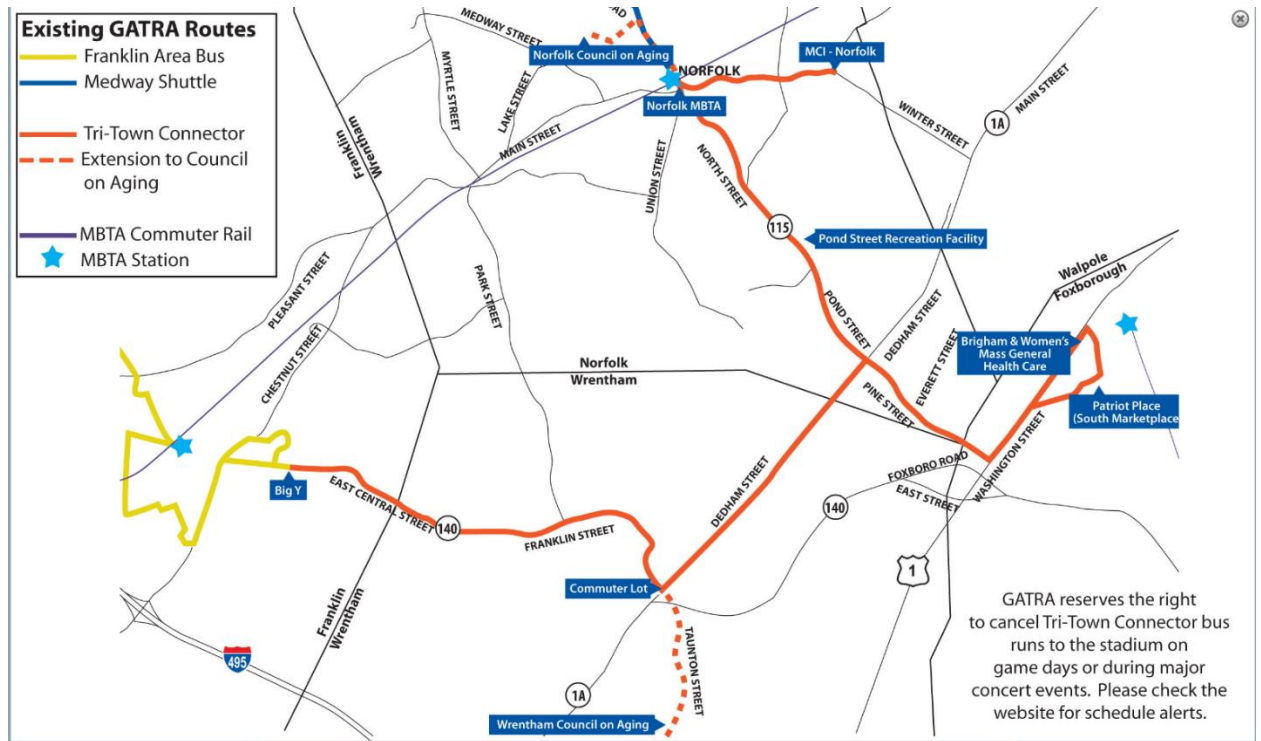
Transportation

Norfolk is situated between the two larger towns of Walpole and Franklin. Norfolk is connected to these towns through roads designated by MassDOT as class 4 roads, or minor roads. It is interesting to note the business concentration patterns in the region focus around the class 3 road ways that run through and connect the towns of Medway, Millis, and Medfield to the North and Walpole, Franklin, Wrentham, and Foxborough to the South. Route 115 acts as a north / south connector between Foxborough and Millis but does not display the same kinds of business density as the east / west connectors in the area.

The Commuter Rail station in town serves an average of 748 inbound customers today (MBTA 2014) and has three convenient commuter parking lots with a total of 520 parking spaces. According to a 2013 CTPS report, only about 62% of those spaces are utilized indicating an oversupply of parking at the Norfolk commuter rail station.

In addition to service from the MBTA, the Greater Attleborough Regional Transportation Authority also operates several bus loops that connect Norfolk with Franklin and other regional towns. The Tri-Town Connector stops at Norfolk station and serves regional attraction such as Patriot Place, Franklin Center, MCI Norfolk, and Y Supermarket also in Franklin. This is a relatively new route.

⁹ Ibid



Regional Shopping Centers

While the Town of Norfolk itself lacks regional shopping and retail opportunities, there are several nearby commercial centers. Patriot Place in Foxborough, Franklin Village Plaza in Franklin, Wrentham Village Outlets, and Plainville Commons in Plainville are all within a 15 minute drive from the Norfolk Town Center. Unsurprisingly, all of the major shopping centers in the area are located on major transportation routes including Route 1, I 95, and I 495.

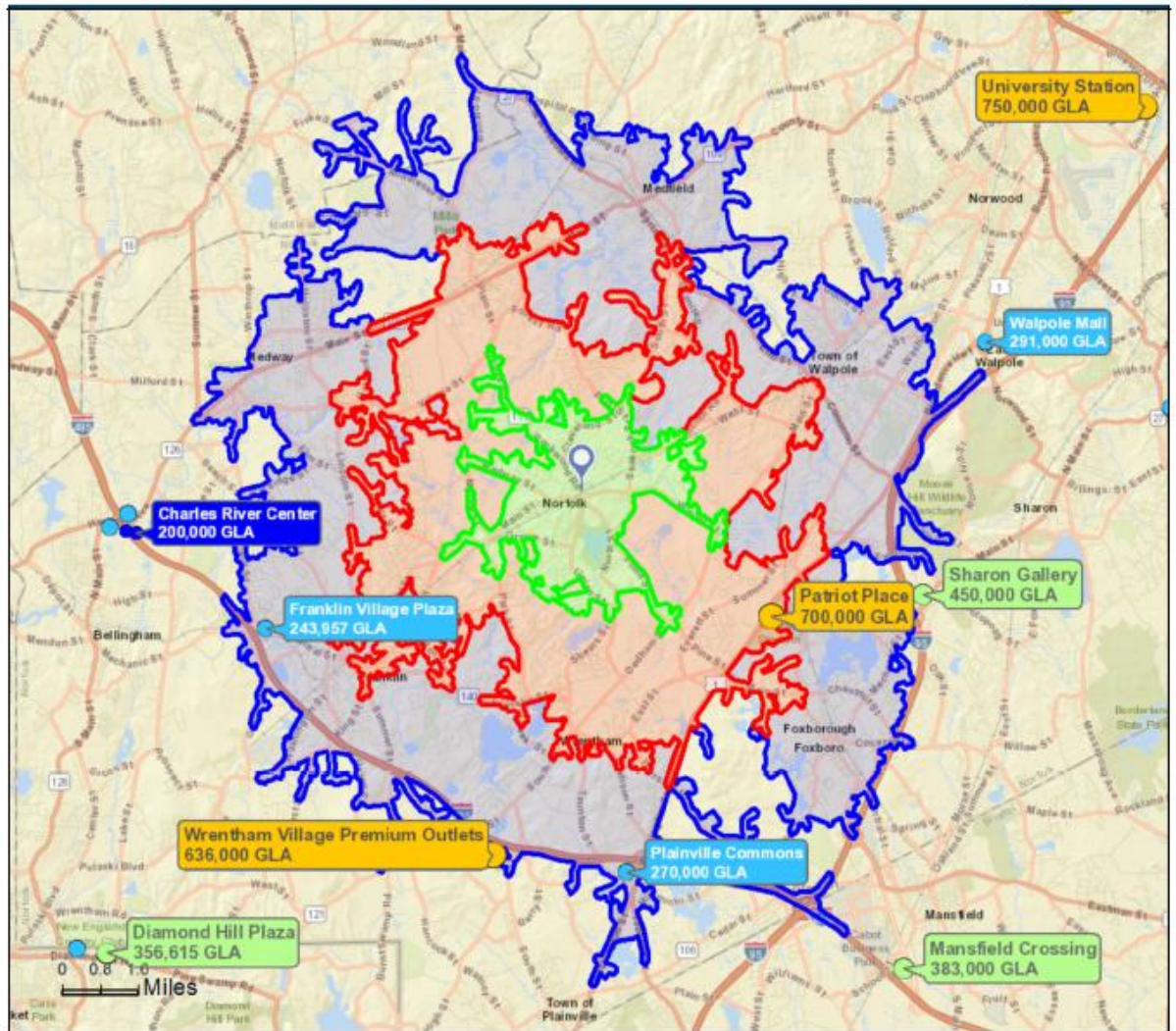
Nearby Franklin is home to Dean College, a smaller sized school with a student population of 1,363.



Major Shopping Center Map

9 Rockwood Rd, Norfolk, Town of, Massachusetts, 02056
Drive Time Bands (4/7/17, 11:17 AM GMT-04:00): 0-5, 5-10, 10-15 minute

Prepared by MAPC using ESRI Business
Latitude: 42.12048
Longitude: -71.32538



- Gross Leasable Area
- Less than 200,000 sq ft
 - 200,001 - 300,000
 - 300,001 - 500,000
 - 500,001 - 800,000
 - More than 800,000



Source: Directory of Major Malls, Inc.

April 07, 2017

Real Estate

Initial scans of real estate websites do not show a dearth of available real estate for new commercial or industrial enterprises. There is a vacant space in the Rt 1A crossroads area and some available space in the newly developed Rivers Edge development, but nothing advertised in the town center.

COMMUNITY FORUM

A key component of the developing the Norfolk TEDS was engaging with the local community to ensure that the voices of town residents were included in the process. In collaboration with the Town of Norfolk, MAPC hosted a community visioning event on May 25th 2017 at the Norfolk Town Library. Approximately 50 local residents were in attendance, including a large contingent of students from the King Phillips Regional High School.

The event began with a brief presentation by MAPC regarding the existing economic conditions in town and then led quickly into a lively open house where attendants were asked to provide feedback on a number of topics at different activity stations.

To complement the community visioning event which was targeted towards engaging resident of the Town of Norfolk, MAPC hosted a business focused breakfast on July 25th , 2017 to create space for the business and development community to participate in the planning process. Similar to the community visioning event, MAPC began the meeting with a quick presentation which led into an informal group discussion on challenges to the business community in town.

The following is a summary of the Open House event stations and findings.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Strengths:

- The Norfolk community is tightly knit and well educated
- One of Norfolk's key assets is its proximity to nature preserves and open space

Weaknesses:

- Town residents, especially young people and new families are not engaged in local governance and town planning processes.
- The cost of living in Norfolk is high and may exclude middle income people from living in town.
- Transit in Norfolk is constrained by road infrastructure and rail frequency

Opportunities:

- Increased access and use of town open spaces by Norfolk residents
- Use of planning process to benefit the community

Threats:

- Overdevelopment and loss of open space
- Spectra pipeline

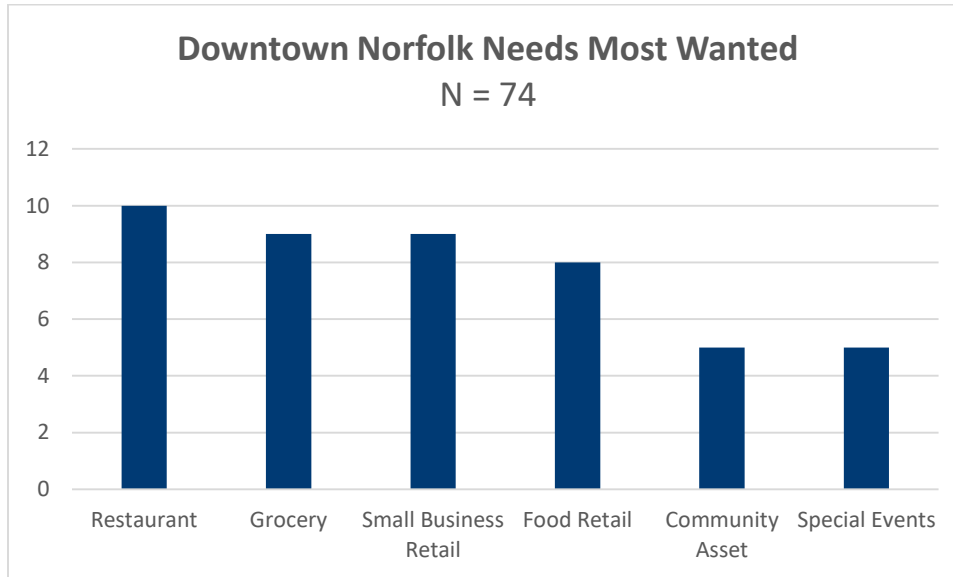
Industry Preference

Finding: There was a clear industry preference for businesses in the Health Care / Education and Scientific / Finance / Insurance / Information sectors.

Residents cited preference for health care specifically for the fast growing nature of the sector, its high wages, and its connection to the growing life sciences industry in the region.

Participants cited preference for the Scientific / Finance / Insurance / and Information sectors for a variety of reasons including increased diversity among the population, providing services to local residents, their smaller footprint in town, and opportunities to prepare young people for high tech jobs.

Downtown Norfolk Needs



There is significant interest in attracting a range of new establishments and activities in the downtown Norfolk area. There were a total of 74 ideas submitted through this activity, those ideas were then categorized to identify a typology of business that residents are most interested in seeing in the downtown. The most frequently cited business and use types were:

- Restaurants (including bars)
- Grocery stores
- Small retailers (book stores, clothing retailers, toy shops)
- Food retailers (ice cream stores, donut shops, butchers)
- Community assets (YMCA, makerspaces, permanent farmers market)
- Special events (parades, food truck day, outdoor programs).

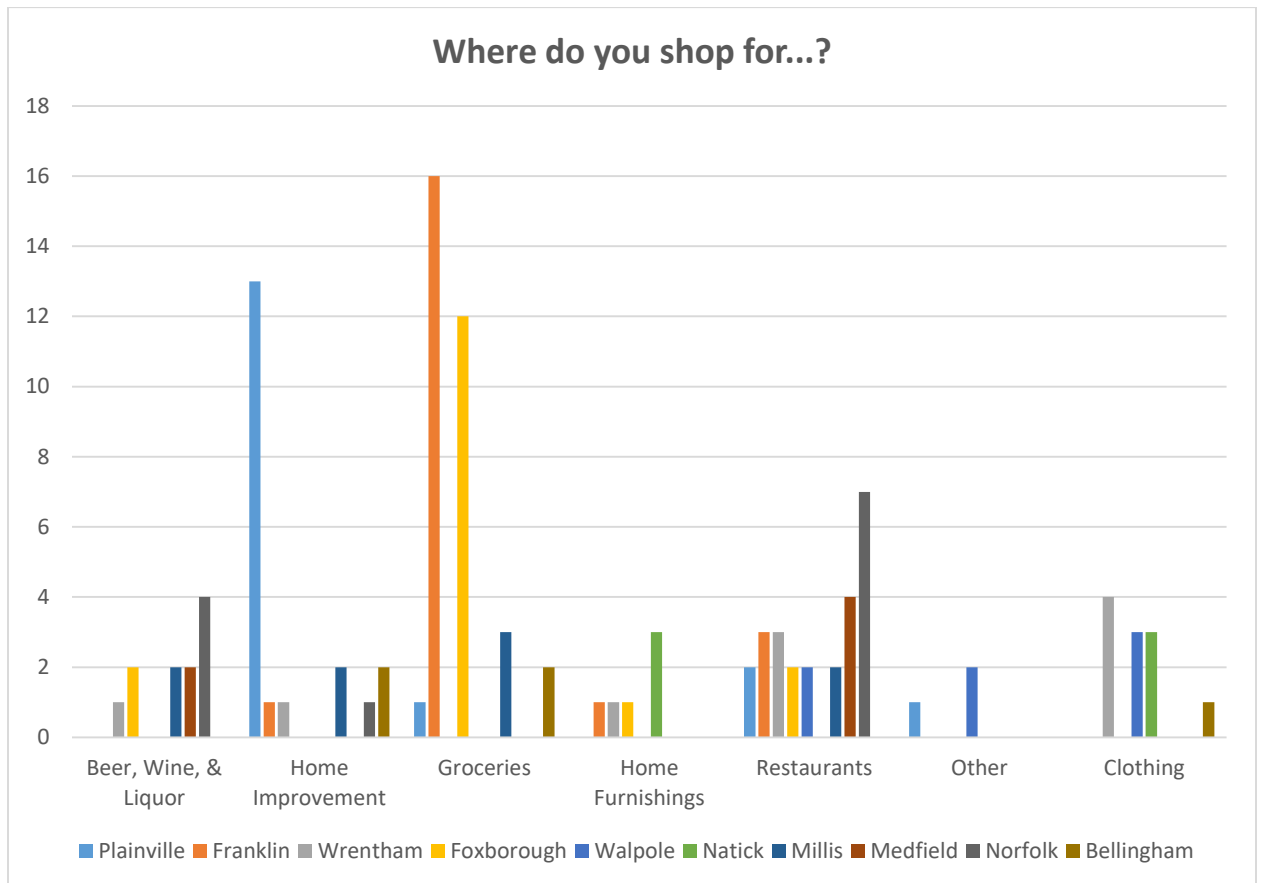
Shopping Areas

Finding: The Lowes in Plainville was the most frequently cited shopping location for home improvement items.

Finding: Franklin and Foxborough were the most frequently cited locations for grocery shopping

Finding: Norfolk was the most frequently cited location for restaurants and beer / wine sales.

Finding: Wrentham, Walpole, and Natick were all cited as frequent locations for clothing shopping.



Work Locations

Boston and Cambridge were unsurprisingly locations where clusters of Norfolk residents work. Woonsocket RI was also cited as a job hub that attracts workers from Norfolk to CVS and Johnson and Johnson centers. Residents also cited work locations along the 495 and 95 corridors.

Recreation

For natural areas and park space residents tend to stay in Norfolk while traveling outside to Boston for arts and cultural experiences as well as sports. Residents cited towns like Franklin, Foxborough, and Bellingham as travel locations for gyms, movies, and restaurants.

Vision

- King Phillip High School is fully funded and succeeds
- Downtown parcels are activated with new businesses and housing
- Some kind of arts / cultural institution is attracted to Norfolk
- Natural areas are conserved

Key Findings from Norfolk Means Business Breakfast

Signage regulations and business visibility was a major topic that arose in the conversation. One developer who was present cited the bylaws governing signage as overly restrictive, especially for multi-tenant commercial buildings. The ability to adequately advertise the businesses located in these types of buildings is a critical issue as storefront visibility can be limited, especially when being viewed from a vehicle.

The Town's "brand" also came up as an issue area for businesses attending the breakfast. The participants discussed how Norfolk was perceived as unfriendly to businesses. While the reality of the Town's position on new business has changed in recent years, there is a lingering hesitation among businesses to try and locate in Norfolk. Additionally, the businesses said that outsiders don't know where Norfolk is or what is there, pointing for a need to improve the Town's reputation and visibility.

Related to the Town's "brand", businesses discussed the education gap that new entrepreneurs are susceptible to when beginning their venture in town. It was discussed that new business owners often struggle with regulations and associated fees which can discourage businesses from opening or severely hamper a new business's success. More easily accessible information regarding the Town's regulations on building codes, permitting, and signage was identified as a key area for improvement.

Beyond working with the Town of Norfolk, one of the businesses in attendance cited a shortage of labor as a challenge within the manual labor and trades industry. The operator discussed the labor supply in the Norfolk area as being primarily for industries associated with high levels of education (as reflected in Norfolk's demographics) and a need to access workers from different areas. He said reaching that audience was a challenge point that would be important to address.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been developed to be in line with the identified trends and challenges discussed in this report. They also reflect the economic development goals that have been identified through previous planning processes (Master Plan, Community Development Plan and Housing Production Plan), the May community meeting, and conversations with municipal staff and local stakeholders.

Those goals are:

- 1. CREATE AN ACTIVE MIXED USE TOWN CENTER**
- 2. PRESERVE THE TOWNS RURAL CHARACTER AND NATURAL OPEN SPACES**
- 3. ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUSINESS / COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS TO REDUCE DEPENDENCE ON SINGLE FAMILY HOME TAX REVENUES.**
- 4. MAINTAIN A FISCALLY STRONG TOWN GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE SUSTAINED RESOURCES FOR THE FUTURE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES**

TOWN CENTER

The Town Center area, specifically the vacant lots on Liberty Lane, presents the greatest opportunity for new development in Norfolk. However their needs to be a catalyst to push new development into action and build a market base for new commercial establishments.

Only by increasing residential density in the Town Center will the town be able to justify a market incentive to the development community for new commercial development. The Town should aim to activate the vacant Liberty Lane sites as well as the underutilized MBTA Commuter Rail lot for new residential development with realistic expectations for local serving ground floor retail space.

Further, the nearby commuter rail offers Norfolk an opportunity to leverage the area for transit oriented development housing and create more affordable and middle income units in the town.

Strategy 1.1: Adjust Zoning for Town Center Lots

The Town of Norfolk has taken positive steps towards enacting zoning that will yield a pedestrian friendly and appealing town center. The current zoning allows for mixed residential and commercial development but also has limitations regarding both the size of commercial development and number of housing units that can be located on a lot. Under current zoning in the Town Center B1 district (outside of the commercial core), commercial development is limited to 15,000 sq ft with larger square foot exceptions for variety stores (30,000 sq ft) and grocery stores (50,000 sq ft). The current zoning limits the construction of residential dwelling units to only 16 bedrooms per lot, with a limit of only two bedrooms per unit. The parking requirements for residential construction are 1.5 parking spaces per unit and 1 space per 200 sq ft of commercial area.

A limit of 16 bedrooms per lot and 2 bedrooms per unit is overly restrictive and may not provide the market incentive for mixed use construction. Additionally, the limit of 2 bedrooms per unit may be in opposition to Federal Fair Housing laws. The high parking requirements may make fully allowable build out of the properties impossible given the sites sizes and restrictions.

The B-1 zoning district does have a provision for shared parking between the residential and commercial uses which would reduce the built parking requirement by 30% per site. However, this provision still requires that area for future parking be held available and unbuilt should the need for it occur, which puts the same construction limitations on the district as the regular parking requirements.

At 9 Liberty Lane, which is a 4.5 acre site that was originally intended to be the home of a grocery store, the current zoning is overly prescriptive and may be discouraging the Town's desired development. As described in the existing conditions section a grocery store use has not materialized in the decade or so since the Town Center lots were subdivided either due to market saturation, land banking, limited road connections, low population, or other factors. It is unlikely that the Town of Norfolk will be able to attract a full service 50,000 sq ft grocery store to the site at

9 Liberty Lane and should consider adjusting the use restrictions to encourage new growth. As the largest site in the Town Center, 9 Liberty Lane is a strategic parcel that if developed could spur on investment in the adjacent parcels.

To identify the appropriate zoning changes the Town Center, the town should take the following steps:

1. Update the B-1 district zoning to allow for more than 2 bedrooms per unit as of right and consider increasing residential density to help support new commercial development.
2. Create a special zoning designation for 9 Liberty Lane that allows for increased commercial area by right and increased residential density. The Town should engage property owners in the downtown in a conversation regarding the possible use changes and density adjustments that could be enacted to encourage development at this site.
3. Conduct a parking study to evaluate whether current parking requirements in the town center are overly restrictive.
4. Coordinate with the Norfolk Affordable Housing Trust to ensure new development in the Town Center promotes the production of affordable housing in alignment with the Town's Housing Production Plan.

Strategy 1.2: Leverage Underutilized Commuter Rail Parking Lot

Norfolk is fortunate to be located on the Franklin Commuter Rail line which opens the town up to Transit Oriented Development opportunities. The MBTA owns and operates three parking lots serving the commuter rail, which may provide more parking than is currently needed. A 2013 study shows that less than 2/3rds of the parking spots in Norfolk are being utilized on a regular basis.

One of the MBTA's parking lots abuts the 4 acre parcel at 9 Liberty Lane currently owned Eastern Development. To further leverage development potential in the Town Center, the Town of Norfolk should work with the MBTA to identify the feasibility for the release of this commuter parking lot for new development. If the parking lot can be released, the Town should adjust the zoning on the parking lot site to match any updated zoning for 9 Liberty Lane, as outlined in the strategy above.

The Town should work with the MBTA to craft an RFP that reflects the communities' desire for mixed use development, desired uses, and an immediate construction timeline. Any RFP released for the site should take into account the MBTA's eTOD guidelines which encourage the inclusion of affordable housing in new development. This would assist the Town in achieving its affordable housing goals as outlined in the recently completed Housing Production Plan.

The MBTA has a robust transit oriented development program and actively seeks out opportunities to leverage its real estate assets towards smart growth development where possible. By bringing the MBTA into the development conversation, the town may be able to catalyze development that static market conditions could not and spur on the envisioned growth in the Town Center.

To begin this process, the town should coordinate a meeting with the MBTA's Office of Real Estate and discuss the potential for releasing the site for purchase.

Strategy 1.3: Leverage State Funds for Infrastructure Improvements

Building a district wastewater treatment system to service the Town Center area was a major step for the Town of Norfolk in creating the right conditions for new development. To fully prepare the Town Center for new growth, specifically the lots on Liberty Lane, the Town must find a way to bring gas infrastructure to the parcels. The most frequently cited desired business use in the Town Center at the May 25th community visioning event was restaurants. Further, local restaurants were the type of establishment most frequented by Norfolk residents within Norfolk. Without gas infrastructure it will be impossible to attract a restaurant use.

Norfolk should apply for a MassWorks grant to fund the installation of gas infrastructure to Town Center lots not currently serviced. This effort should be coordinated with local elected officials to advocate for additional funding for the community.

RT 1A / 115 CROSS ROADS

Continuing to support the growth in the Rt 1A / 115 Crossroads will be critical to achieving Norfolk's economic development goals. While the private market appears to be strong in the area, the Town could play a role in facilitating the growth of a construction trades cluster and promotion of the unique consumer businesses in the area.

Strategy 2.1: Actively Market Vacant Lots in Shire Industrial Park to Construction Trades Businesses

The Shire Park is currently home to several construction related firms including Island Lighting and Power, CEI Boston and MP Masonry. As discussed in the existing conditions section of this report the Crossroads district is an advantageous location for construction firms because of the easy access it provides to a regional client base.

The Town of Norfolk should leverage the Crossroads districts location and its emerging construction cluster to attract other construction trade related firms. By signaling the town is interested in growing this cluster it may be able to differentiate itself from other nearby towns and bring in businesses that can support each other, provide good jobs, and grow the town's tax base.

The economic development committee should work with the existing construction firms in Norfolk to identify industry organizations that could promote available real estate in Norfolk, host site tours, and develop marketing collateral.

Strategy 2.2: Promote Collective Advertising

While the industrial business sector is the established base of the Crossroads area, there is also a growing consumer facing business cluster in the area. The specialty beverage stores, food establishments, and other retailers in the area could benefit from collective marketing strategies to increase awareness of their establishments and draw in new customers.

The Town's Economic Development Committee should convene a working group with the consumer facing establishments in the Crossroads area to identify the methods and placement of any collective advertising. The Town should dedicate funding for this working group to use in the development of materials and purchasing of advertising.

Strategy 2.3 Identify Support Services for Anchor Businesses

The Crossroads area of Norfolk benefits from hosting two large anchor businesses; ForeKicks and Pondville Medical Center. It is also in very close proximity to Gillete Stadium and Patriot Place. At the May 25th Community Visioning event the community expressed a clear preference for the healthcare, finance, and professional sectors as industries to grow in Norfolk. The Economic Development Committee should explore the types of support services that the larger anchor businesses in the area need and identify areas of overlap between those services and the community's desired business uses in town.

TOWNWIDE

While focusing on the Town Center and Crossroads area as strategic growth locations for new businesses and development, the Town should also pursue town wide strategies to support the existing business community of Norfolk and build the Town's reputation as being business friendly.

Strategy 3.1 Business Friendly Norfolk Office Hours

The Town should host a regularly occurring office hour's style event where town businesses can meet with all regulatory agencies as well as members of the economic development committee in the same location at the same time to address outstanding issues. This would reduce the amount of time needed for businesses to address concerns, as well as streamline the Town's operations. The event should be held at a time that is convenient to the business community to ensure that all operators are able to attend and engage. This would also allow for potential business operators to meet with town officials in a coordinated manner.

Strategy 3.2 Convene Advisory Committee to Adjust Town Procedures

Updating Norfolk's permitting and regulatory procedures was a frequently cited topic in conversations with business operators. To address these issues, the Town should convene an advisory committee made up of representatives of the economic development committee and business operators in town to identify the key areas for improvement and make recommendations for adjustments.