



# NORFOLK

## Master Plan 2035

### Topic Briefing and Geographic Summaries

*Working Draft for Discussion*  
September 20, 2023



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# Norfolk Master Plan

## Steering Committee

Joe Burke, Resident

Eric Diamond, Planning Board

Dan Feyock, Resident

Erin Hunt, Resident

Kevin Kalkut, Select Board

Richard McCarthy, Town Planner

Melissa Meo, Planning Board

Chris Montfort, Planning Board

Chad Peck, Planning Board

Jen Pittore, Resident

Gary Sullivan, Planning Board

John Weddleton, Planning Board

## Ambassadors

Charles Iacono, Resident

Colby Fillippelli, Resident

## Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

MAPC has been hired by the Town of Norfolk to facilitate the Master Plan process and provide technical planning assistance to the Town to support and develop the 2035 Master Plan. This interim deliverable of the Norfolk Master Plan process has been prepared by MAPC. MAPC is the regional planning agency serving the people who live and work in the 101 cities and towns of Metropolitan Boston.

# Introduction

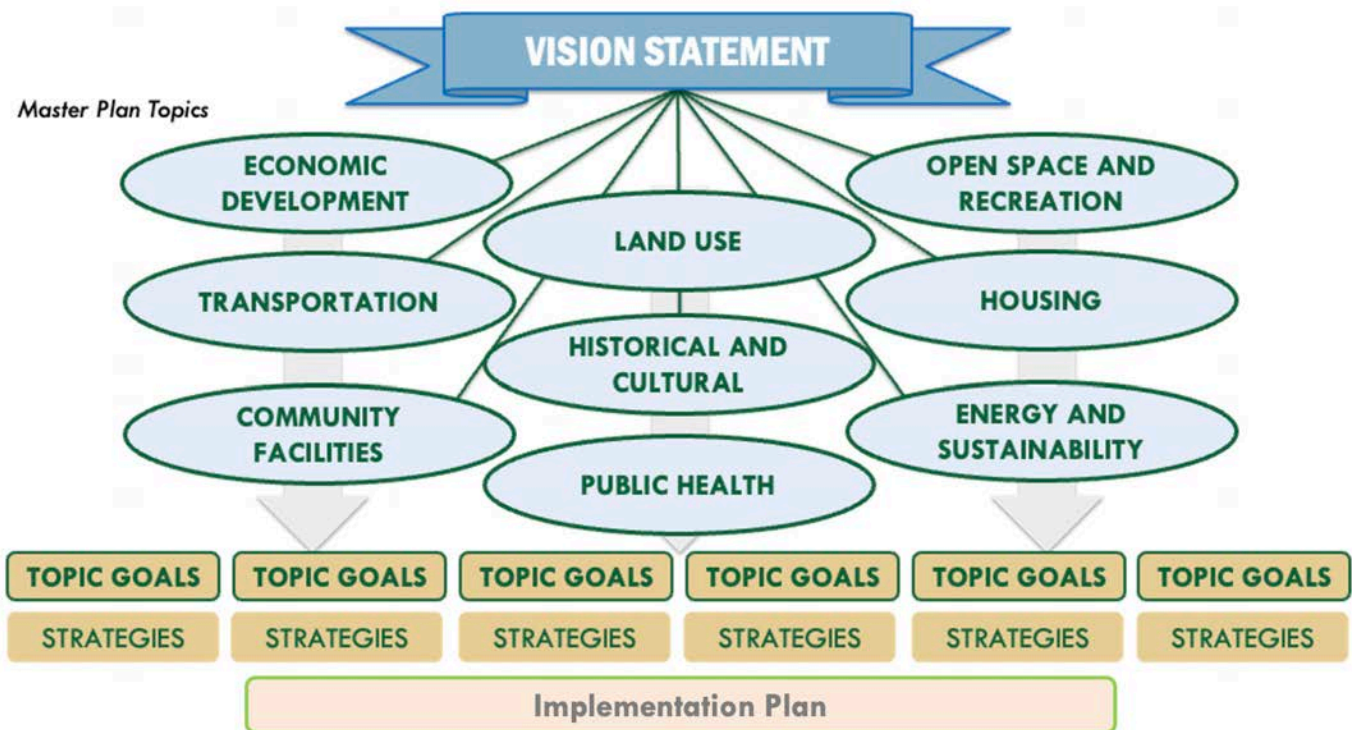
## Master Plan

A Town-wide Master Plan is an important opportunity for the Norfolk Town leadership and community of residents, business owners, and property owners to take stock of the current circumstances of the Town, reflect on past successes and challenges, and to set a shared path for improvements in the future. A Town-wide Master Plan is sometimes referred to as a comprehensive plan as it contemplates a wide range of topics across the Town's entire geography. The range of topics include economic development, land use, housing, open space and recreation, transportation, historical and cultural resources, community facilities and services, community health, and energy and sustainability.

for any Town that has established a Planning Board, that Board shall make a Master Plan as the Planning Board may deem advisable, and from time to time extend or perfect that plan. The Town's previous Master Plan was completed in 2007. The Master Plan process is being guided by the Norfolk Master Plan Steering Committee comprised of all members of the Planning Board, a member of the Select Board, and additional resident representatives.

The diagram below shows the organization of the Master Plan content. An overarching Vision Statement is supported by the goals and strategies of interrelated topics culminating in a plan for implementation.

A Master Plan is required by Massachusetts General Laws (MGL), Chapter 41, section 81D



## Process

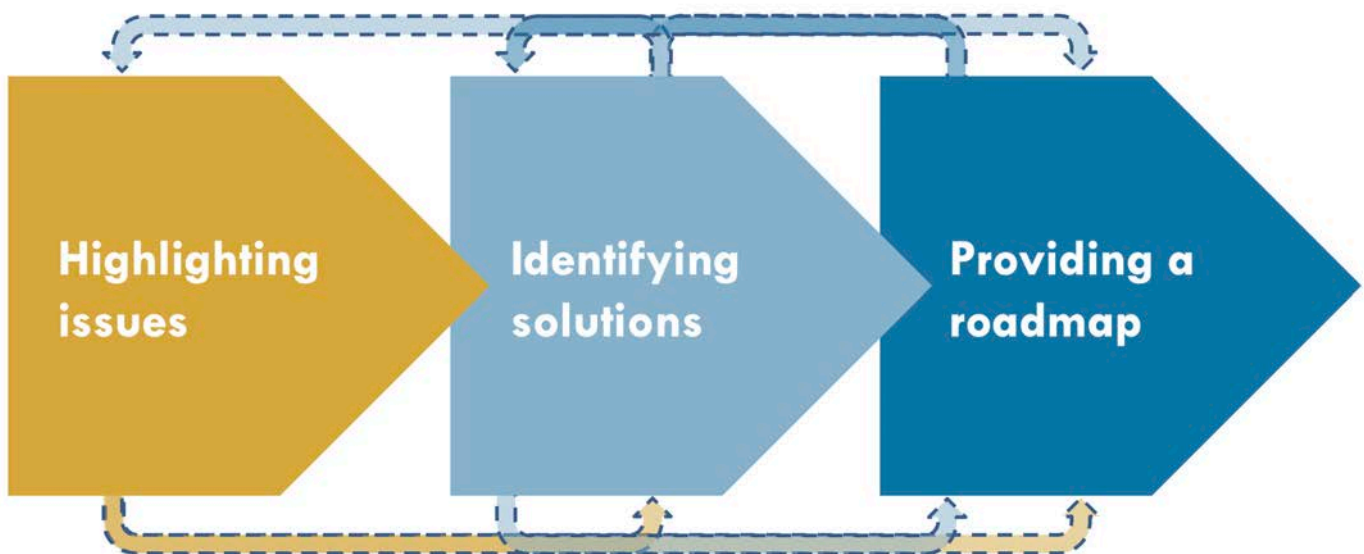
The Norfolk Master Plan process is designed to be undertaken over about a year and a half of engagement with the community. Community engagement is a central feature of the Master Plan process which has been designed with care to thoughtfully engage a broad and inclusive representation of Norfolk residents. Through interviews with Town leadership and staff, small group discussions, large community forums, virtual meetings, tabling at events, and online surveys the Master Plan team gathered feedback to identify the challenges facing Norfolk today and the resonant themes of a shared vision for the future.

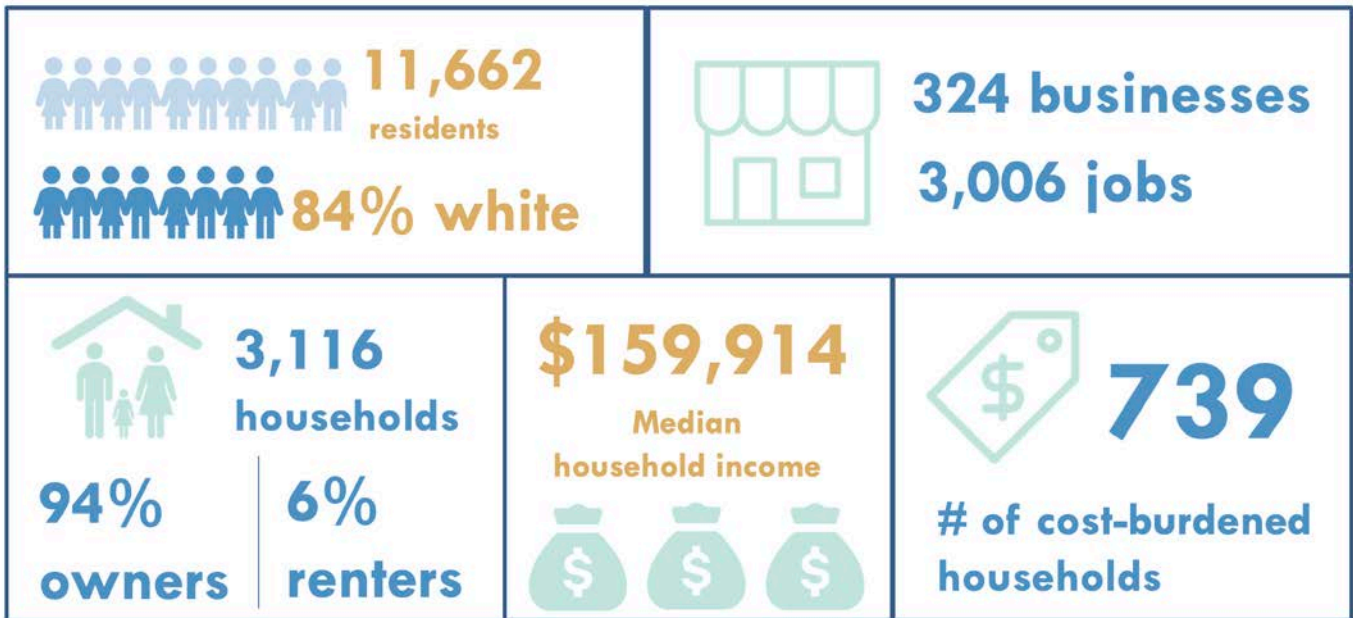
In broad terms, the first phase of this process is to gather feedback and analyze data to define and highlight the issues facing the Town and residents. Once the issues and recurring themes have been identified, the second phase will focus on exploring solutions. The solutions will be defined in the form of goals and strategies for each of the Master Plan topics. The third phase of the process is to define a guide for making a positive impact on the issues identified and to define possible actions that would advance the goals and strategies. The diagram below shows these three phases of the process and feedback loops that will occur between them.

This summary document is an instrument of the ongoing Master Plan process and is intended to provide a snapshot of the results of ongoing community engagement and data analysis efforts. This document is prepared at a time in the Master Plan process where a transition between gathering feedback and data on challenges turns toward beginning to identify goals and solutions. The nature of this document is both interim and draft and it is hoped that the information documented invites additional feedback and insights from Master Plan Committee and the community.

## Snapshot of Norfolk Today

The Town of Norfolk has 11,662 residents according to United States Census data. The household size and composition translate the residents into 3,116 households. The households are predominantly homeowners, with 96% owning and 6% renting. Most homes are single family homes in the Town. The data shows that overall the population is 84% white, though the racial composition of the population is impacted by the prison populations within the Town. The median household income is \$159,914. While this compares well to the median household income in the Commonwealth, households in Norfolk do have issues with the affordability of the Town. 739





households are cost-burdened, meaning that they spend more than 30% of their household income on their mortgage or rent. The Town is home to 324 businesses, including many small businesses and home occupations. The businesses support over 3,000 jobs. 87% of the workers in Norfolk drive to work alone. 10% of the workers take transit (the commuter rail) for their commute.

### Summary of Previous Studies

This Master Plan process occurs within the context of near constant study and renewal of studies that occurs within a well-managed municipality. The Master Plan team has worked to fit within the context of these previous efforts and to build on the foundation they provide. A brief summary of the most relevant previous studies is provided. All of the previous studies are available on the Town’s website for anyone interested in additional information from a particular report. The plans are presented in reverse chronological order.

### 2022 Housing Production Plan

The current Housing Production Plan provided updated demographic and housing data to understand how Norfolk compares to neighboring communities, Norfolk County, and Massachusetts overall. Analysis of the Town’s subsidized housing

inventory (SHI) highlighted that Norfolk is unique in that about half of affordable units are available for ownership. The plan outlined goals and strategies for creating additional affordable homes to reach “safe harbor” (at least 10 percent of all housing units are affordable). The plan noted how many households experience cost burden (nearly 700 at the time when the plan was done) and potentially qualify for affordable housing (530). The plan does not consider how the existing share of affordable housing, along with the projected new units that could be added to the SHI, will meet the needs of Norfolk residents earning lower incomes. Additional goals in the plan recognize the need for Norfolk to diversify its housing stock (only 4% of homes are rentals; over 90% of homes are single-family) to better meet the changing needs of residents. The plan recommends concentrating future housing growth in the Town Center and the Southwood site, while also leveraging Town-owned surplus lands to increase affordable housing. Housing partners like the Municipal Affordable Housing Trust and Norfolk Housing Authority are referenced throughout plan strategies to foster collaboration as the Housing Production Plan is implemented.

## **2022 Metacomet Greenway – Norfolk Feasibility Study**

The Beta Group prepared a Feasibility Study for the Metacomet Greenway along the former Old Colony Rail corridor in the Town of Norfolk between the Wrentham and Walpole Town Lines. The proposed Metacomet Greenway segment in Norfolk will be 1.5 miles of an overall vision for an 18-mile greenway between Cumberland, RI and Walpole, MA. The feasibility study assesses existing conditions, engineering design parameters, potential project impacts, and cost and implementation considerations. Potential impacts were identified for the right of way, natural and cultural environmental resources, and environmental hazardous materials. Overall, the study concluded that the Metacomet Greenway is a feasible project. The construction cost is estimated to range from \$2.3M to \$6.0M based on four possible alternative alignments. Key recommendations of the study include engaging with the owners of the three subject parcels as well as any parcel identified on the plans to be impacted by the proposed project; consider additional access points and pathways to the Greenway; coordinating further planning of the Greenway with the adjoining towns of Wrentham and Walpole; coordinating early with the Massachusetts Historical Commission for impacts to historic railroad bridge abutments; coordinating closely with the Southwood Hospital property; further exploring details of proposed alignments for accessibility and safety with alternatives at two roadway crossings; and exploring possible State and Federal funding sources.

## **2021 Norfolk Town Center Wastewater Study**

The Town relies primarily on septic systems for development, with the one exception being a municipally owned wastewater treatment facility on Meetinghouse Road (acquired by the Town in 2015). This facility provides sewer service to a limited section of Town Center. It is permitted to provide for a peak flow of 30,000 GPD to a limited area originally planned to include office space, a grocery store, a restaurant, 86 units of

assisted living/potential nursing home, and a day care center. The initial development plans changed and today the following services are approved under the current MassDEP permit: 64 condo units, Walgreens, Cillas Coffee Shop, Norfolk Physical Therapy, and a number of vacant commercially zoned parcels. The Town maintains control of the MassDEP permit; however, they contract with WhiteWater Water and Wastewater Solutions to operate and maintain the facility. In 2019, the Town began the process of rezoning Town Center to allow for more compact, dense development near the commuter rail station. The zoning changes (new B-1 District) were adopted in 2021. To facilitate the type of developments now allowed under the new zoning, the Town needs additional off-site wastewater infrastructure. The Town received a Housing Choice Grant from the state to initiate a wastewater infrastructure study.

The study analyzed the current condition of the existing wastewater treatment facility and showed that it is generally in good working condition and operating as intended. For determining future use, the consultant used the buildout analysis conducted as part of the B-1 zoning project, supplementing buildout capacity as needed to account for different development scenarios. The study presented three alternatives for the town to consider: 1) make no changes to the wastewater system; 2) expand the existing Meetinghouse Road facility; or 3) construct a new wastewater treatment facility and discharge field. Alternative 1 does not support the buildout envisioned through the B-1 zoning project. Alternative 2 is constrained by land ownership issues (the Meetinghouse facility is on privately-owned land) and lack of land area for further expansion. The remainder of the study focused on alternative 3, reviewing how a new system could be sized and sited. The new system would work in tandem with the Meetinghouse Road facility through its useful life. The new system could be designed and operated in a phased approach, where it could assume the capacity of the Meetinghouse Road facility once it has reached the end of its design life. The study recommends siting a new facility on



the existing Town-owned fire station parcel (117 Main Street). Construction of the facility could coincide with construction of a new fire station. Several locations were identified and reviewed for potential groundwater discharge of the treated effluent from a future wastewater treatment facility, with the preferred location being the Parks and Recreation Fields at the Freeman Kennedy School. The study estimated that the preferred alternative will cost \$5.6 million. A variety of different funding mechanisms are detailed in the study. Next steps include regulatory coordination with MassDEP, additional hydrogeological testing, public outreach, exploration of funding sources, and engineering design.

### **2020 Town Center Zoning Study (B-1 District)**

In 2020 the Town of Norfolk concluded a study that recommended zoning changes for the B-1 District in Norfolk Town Center. The zoning recommendations were subsequently passed at Norfolk’s Town Meeting. The zoning changes’ purpose was to encourage the establishment of a vibrant mixed-use Town Center. The Town of Norfolk worked with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to study zoning recommendations, design guidelines, and other actions to support mixed-use development in the Town Center. This work builds upon the vision established for the Town Center through the Town of Norfolk Master Plan (2007) and builds on recommendations of the 2018 Townwide Economic Development Plan. Based on these prior plans, the zoning changes intended to: expand and diversify the Town’s commercial tax base; focus population growth in the Town Center; provide a wider variety of housing options for the residents of Norfolk; and provide additional support for small businesses in the Town Center through an expanded residential population that will spend money locally. In addition to zoning changes, infrastructure improvement needs of the Town Center are also noted as important and include wastewater and natural gas infrastructure.

### **2020 MVP (Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness) Community Resilience Building Workshop Report**

Like other municipalities, Norfolk is experiencing an increasing number of impacts due to climate change. The Town has experienced more weather-related events like blizzards, nor’easters, and severe wind and rain events. These events have led to extensive power outages and downed trees. As these natural hazards are likely to worsen and occur more frequently, the Town received an EEA grant to conduct a Community Resilience Building workshop with municipal officials as part of the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program. Conducting this workshop allowed Norfolk to achieve “MVP” designation. The workshop was designed to assess past planning and resiliency measures and identify a list of strengths and priority actions for the immediate future. Through small group discussions, the following hazards were identified as the most prevalent and/or impactful: wind/lightning; severe storms/flooding; drought; damage from trees; invasive species; and fires. An interesting observation regarding wind and storm hazards is the unique condition in Norfolk where every road in Town is designated a “scenic road” – meaning that trees are more protected and prevalent near roadways and aerial power lines. Workshop participants identified a variety of vulnerability and community strengths and assets before deciding on future actions and resolutions to improve community resilience. Actions and resolutions were prioritized, with the following items being ranked as highest priority:

- Condition assessment of existing stormwater system (drains, catch basins, culverts, detention/retention systems, etc.). Roads were included as they relate to the conveyance of stormwater and are impacted by deteriorating and failing culverts.
- Establish a tree maintenance program. Public outreach and reporting related to vector born illnesses and invasive species to be part of this program.

- Evaluate existing hazardous waste sites in town and the potential for redevelopment.
- Keep existing Regional Communications Center as “top-notch”. Facilitate other towns joining this regional partnership.
- Maintain the rural character of Norfolk and its existing open space. Implement an open space transfer plan and transfer of development rights (TDR).

Findings from the workshop serve as a basis for Norfolk’s MVP Action Grant application. So far, Norfolk has not been awarded an MVP Action Grant for any of these priorities. Norfolk did partner with Wrentham on an FY23 MVP Action Grant application to explore feasibility of removing the derelict Eagle Dam.

### **2019 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan**

Encouraging walking and biking is a priority for the Town of Norfolk. When residents can replace short driving trips with active transportation, it helps lower traffic congestion and improves public health and the livability of the Town. This Prioritization Plan enables the Town to access resources from the Commonwealth’s Complete Streets Funding program that can help build sidewalks, bike paths, safer crossings, and many other opportunities to improve daily lives. A Complete Street is one that provides safe and accessible travel alternatives for all modes – walking, biking, transit, and motorized vehicles. The prioritization process resulted in a list of project proposals that aim to both improve the Town’s existing infrastructure and further the Town’s goal of achieving a comprehensive active transportation network that would fully support Complete Streets principles in the future. The final project list is outlined in the MassDOT (Massachusetts Department of Transportation) Tier 2 document, which will be used by the Town to schedule the construction of Complete Streets for the coming years. The prioritization plan list included 33 projects that are geographically distributed throughout the Town. The most frequently listed type of project is sidewalk construction.

### **2018 Townwide Economic Development Strategy**

MAPC worked with the Town to develop a townwide economic development strategy. The Town wanted to encourage new commercial and industrial development to expand the local tax base, which in 2017 was comprised mostly (92%) of revenue from residential property taxes. The strategy notes that there are two main commercial districts – Town Center and Route 1A/115 crossroads. Past economic development strategies encouraged growing these existing centers, with an emphasis on mixed use downtown “traditional New England” style developments in Town Center. The strategy notes that historically business attraction has been limited due to lack of sewer and stormwater management facilities, few local anchor businesses to distinguish Norfolk from other commercial centers, burdensome permitting, and a weak consumer market. Recent efforts to attract economic growth included the installation of a wastewater treatment system along Liberty Lane in Town Center and better marketing, tax incentives, and streamlined permitting processes. The strategy notes that while Norfolk is on a commuter rail line, the Town lacks access to any major highways. Despite some barriers to economic growth, two significant commercial developments have occurred – a 200,000 SF furniture assembly business (Jofran) and a large indoor recreation facility (ForeKicks). At the time of the strategy, Norfolk had approximately 310 businesses, with close to 3,500 jobs. A cluster of construction firms provide middle income jobs. About 54 businesses are concentrated in Town Center, while the Route 115/1A crossroads area had about 90 businesses at the time of the study.

The strategy includes four recommendations focused on growing the local economy. The first recommendation focuses on opportunities within Town Center, like updating the zoning, considering transit-oriented development on the commuter rail parking lot, and exploring funding for improved infrastructure. Recommendations for the Route 115/1A crossroads center on marketing available land and supporting existing and future businesses.

Townwide recommendations encourage more business-friendly measures, like offering office hours to help businesses navigate permitting processes and looking for ways to streamline existing procedures.

### **2017 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)**

The OSRP states that it was prepared as the Town continues to face steady population growth and commercial and industrial development. The plan summary continues to say that this development adds stress on the region's natural resources as well as the character of the Town. The goals of the OSRP include: identify, preserve and protect the historical, cultural, and natural resources that contribute to the character of the Town; protect and enhance the quality of Norfolk's surface and ground water as source municipal and private drinking water and for wildlife and recreation use; increase environmental awareness among all sectors of the community; enhance public access to and use existing conservation lands where appropriate, and establish continuous greenbelts, especially along waterways such as the Charles River; and improve and increase recreational opportunities in Norfolk. Public access to already-protected open space and awareness of resources are noted management needs. The Action Plan includes added specific actions: provide all neighborhoods with appropriate recreation; investigate further use of Town property for passive and/or active recreation; develop management plans for each conservation parcel; and maintain communication with neighboring towns to protect water resources which cross town borders.

### **2010 Hazard Mitigation Plan**

Norfolk is threatened by the majority of hazards common across Massachusetts. Floods and winter storms are the most prevalent hazards, with hurricanes, severe storms, tornadoes, and brush fires being moderately frequent. Dam failures and earthquakes could but are less likely to occur. Landslides are less of a concern in Norfolk compared to other parts of the state.

Fortunately, Norfolk's critical facilities are located outside of FEMA flood zones; however, the Public Safety Building was identified as impacted by local flooding that often results in flooding and septic backups. A few other locations were identified as local flood hazards – these often result from inadequate drainage systems or other local conditions that do not necessarily coincide with FEMA flood zones. Norfolk has several mitigation measures in place for flood-related hazards, including participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), seasonal street sweeping, catch basin cleaning, roadway treatments, stormwater regulations, and Community Preservation Act for open space preservation. To mitigate fire-related hazards, The Town requires permits for outdoor burning, regulates fire hydrants, and considers fire access as part of subdivision review. The plan includes goals and objectives focused on protecting the health and safety of residents and preventing or reducing property damages that result from natural hazards. The Town commits to proactive hazard mitigation planning by seeking funding to further mitigation efforts, working with partners to implement the hazard mitigation plan, and making sure impacts of natural hazards are less likely to impact future development.

High priority mitigation measures were also identified in the plan. These include mitigating the flooding issues at the Public Safety Building; flood mitigation on Campbell Street; addressing flooding risk associated with the City Mills Pond Dam; redirecting drainage on Shirley Lane; equipping the fire department with updated emergency response equipment; and acquiring GIS and mapping technology to assess risk and current conditions and improve emergency response.

### **2007 Master Plan**

The Master Plan's intent is to establish clear policy for future decisions for (8) categories of goals: Economic Development, Business and Commercial Development, Housing, Natural Resources, Open Space, Recreation, Facilities and Services, and

Circulation. The Master Plan's ultimate purpose is to inspire and guide implementation of the goals and objectives that best meet the community's "vision" of Norfolk through 2017 and beyond. Such implementation will require actions by Town boards, commissions, and committees, voter approval at Town Meeting of new or modified zoning bylaws, and general advocacy and support by the residents of Norfolk.

Community engagement involved a citizen survey, four citizen forums (one for each Precinct), one business and commercial property owner forum.

Key accomplishments since the earlier Master Plan in 1992 included:

- Zoning was established multiple commercial and mixed use districts along major highways of Route 1A and Route 115 including district C4 at Route 115/Holbrook Street and B1 at the Town Center
- Drainage infrastructure was created for Town Center
- Constructed the Town Hall
- Created position of Town Administrator in 1998
- Passed the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and created a Community Preservation Committee (CPC) in 2001 and 2002 respectively
- Created a Department of Public Works (DPW) in 2006
- Created an Affordable Housing Committee (AHC) in 2007
- Re-chartered an Economic Development Committee in 2007

Key goals and objectives of the Master Plan included:

- The primary Economic Development goal was reducing the share of tax revenue supported by residential properties. In 2007 the Master Plan reports that 91% of taxable land is residential property and that 94% of tax revenues are generated by residential properties. The goal was to generate 15% of tax revenues from business/commercial properties and 85% from residential properties.
- The primary Business and Commercial Growth goal was to develop the Town Center as a traditional, pedestrian-oriented, New England Town Center with a mix of retail, service, and residential uses. The overall goal was to develop all the commercial districts to support tax revenue needs of Norfolk while creating retail and commercial employment.
- The primary Housing goal was to create a process toward achieving the State-mandated goal of providing 10% of Norfolk's housing as "affordable" by 2017 by employing smart-growth standards and promoting a diversity of housing types (including age-restricted, assisted living, single family homes, and townhouses) to accommodate all age and lifestyle groups.
- The primary Natural and Historical Resources goal was to both conserve natural resources and develop policies and regulatory measures that protect natural resources, especially water resources, to meet the Town's full growth potential and provide water capacity matching future water demand.
- The primary Open Space goal was to identify and selectively preserve, protect and/or acquire the historical, cultural, and natural resources and open space properties that contribute to the character of the Town.

- The primary Recreation goal was to add outdoor recreation areas, improve-expand existing outdoor recreation areas and increase indoor recreational opportunities in Norfolk with added active and passive recreational opportunities in support of the Town's growth.
- The primary Facilities and Services goal was to provide building facilities, sewer-wastewater, storm water and other infrastructure services to support Norfolk's current and future demands in support of full development of public and private facilities in the Town Center.
- The primary Circulation goal was to identify and resolve vehicle and pedestrian intersection problems at the Town Center's commuter rail crossing, Pond Street-Dedham Street (Route 1A/Route 115) intersection and other key areas and provide safe and efficient vehicle circulation to support future growth.

homes. In this scenario, all of the homes would be located in Norfolk. A second concept consisted solely of business growth with no residential homes. The study area would be redeveloped as manufacturing/office/R&D uses, resulting in 2.9M SF of commercial space. The study did not recommend a preferred scenario.

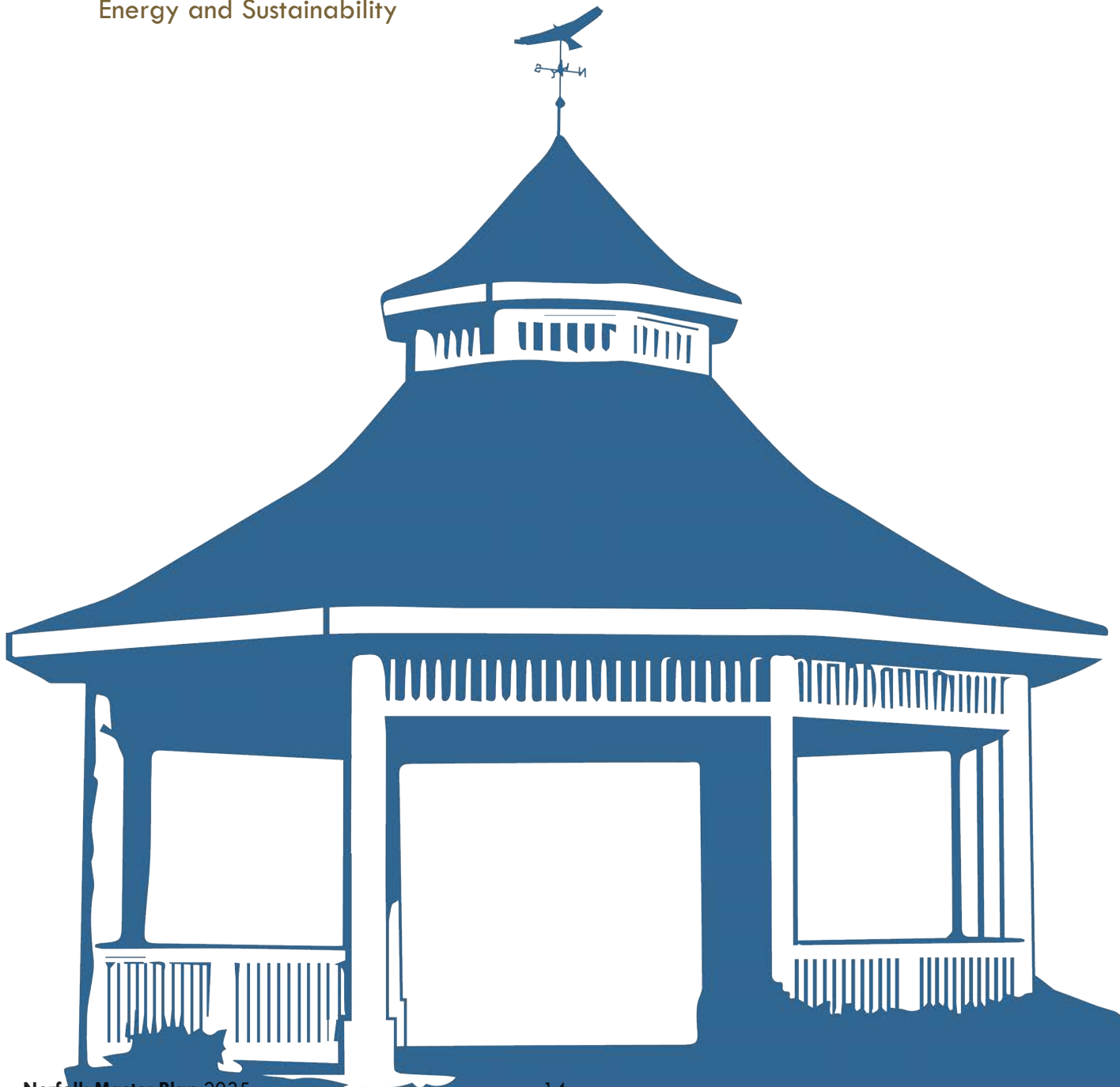
### **2007 Route 1A Corridor Study (with Walpole)**

Norfolk partnered with Walpole and MAPC to undertake an analysis of several parcels along Route 1A near the Walpole/Norfolk boundary. The study area included the Department of Correction (DOC) land in Walpole, former Pondville State Hospital in Norfolk, Walpole Industrial Park, and the MWRA property and additional parcels on the west side of Main Street. The study analyzed two development concepts and presented the impacts of different scenarios. The first concept recommended extending sewer service to the Industrial Park and Main Street parcels to encourage more economic growth and overcome the current constraints from the Water Resources Protection Overlay District. The DOC and MWRA properties would not have any change in use; and the Caritas property would be developed as currently zoned – with offices on 16 acres and age-restricted housing on 70 acres. This concept would result in 2M SF of new development, including 240 new

# Topic Briefs

## Topic Briefs

- Economic Development
- Land Use
- Housing
- Open Space and Recreation
- Transportation
- Historical and Cultural Resources
- Community Facilities and Services
- Community Health
- Energy and Sustainability





## Topic Brief

# Economic Development

### Quick Facts

- The median household income in Norfolk is \$168,281 (in 2021 dollars) compared to \$89,026 in the Commonwealth. (ACS, 2017-2021)
- 95.6% of homes are owner-occupied housing in Norfolk compared to 62.4% in the Commonwealth.
- The Town is home to families with young children with almost 25% of the entire population is under 18 years old.
- 1,519 workers come into the Town for work and 3,965 travel out of the Town for work.
- A total of about 3,000 jobs are available in Town across 324 total establishments. The construction industry and healthcare and social assistance employing the most workers.
- The majority of the Town is residential. The Town has 20 retail properties, 11 office properties, and 22 industrial properties. Many businesses exist as home occupations.

### Key Issues

- There is a general lack of well-paying jobs located within the town of Norfolk.
- There is a lack of local amenities and services to serve as an economic driver and tax contributor to the Town.
- Norfolk has minimal socioeconomic and racial diversity, which is further exacerbated by the lack of economic opportunity available.
- The lack of well-paying jobs in town means Norfolk residents are leaving Town to find work, unless they work remotely or own their own business. The jobs that do exist do not necessarily match home prices, meaning local workers live outside of Norfolk. Both of these circumstances increase commute times for workers both within the town and those that travel outside of it.
- Residents and employment data emphasizes that there are very few locally-owned storefronts. Public comments support growth of small businesses.
- The local tax base is majority residential, something that was often noted in public feedback and continues to be a priority issue for Norfolk as diverse sources for revenue are required to pay for services and infrastructure.
- Lack of sewerage system as a barrier for economic growth and development.

# Economic Development

## Introduction

The Town of Norfolk is generally a relatively affluent suburban town located approximately 30 miles from Boston. The vast majority of residents are homeowners at 96%. The median home value is still viewed by residents as relatively affordable at \$563,800. However, the data may not be keeping pace with the current housing price increases which has been reported by residents and increasingly unaffordable. The Town has a 1.8% reported poverty rate in its population of 11,662 residents. The median household income is \$168,281 among the 55% of the population in the civilian labor force.

Approximately 50% of the population has achieved a Bachelor's degree or higher, comparable to the Commonwealth in general.. Housing turnover is stable with 84% of the population in the same home for over one year. Nearly all households have a computer and broadband internet at home, 99% and 98% respectively.

In past planning processes and in the current Master Plan community engagement, Norfolk residents have expressed an interest in encouraging new commercial and industrial development to expand the Town's tax base. The Norfolk Townwide Economic Development Strategy in 2018 highlighted the need to reduce the portion of the Town's tax revenue that was generated from residential property taxes. In order to implement this goal, the Townwide Economic Development Strategy focused on two main districts that the Town is interested in developing for commercial and industrial purposes, the Town Center and the Route 1A and 115 crossroads.

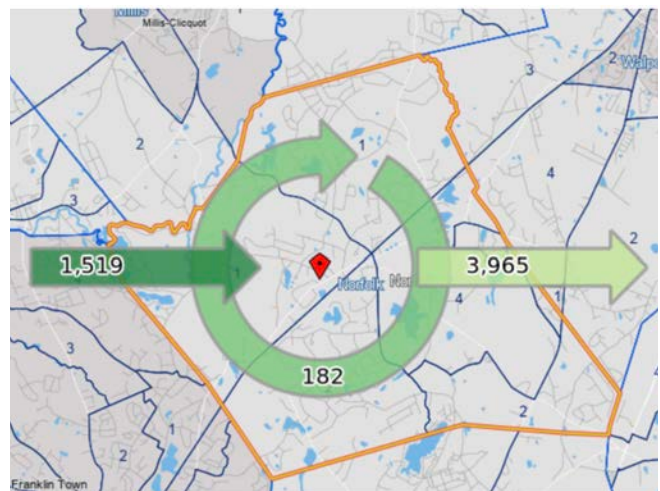
The Town Center hosts a mix of commercial establishments, municipal assets, institutions and local small businesses. The Town Hall and administrative offices are also located in the Town Center and account for a major source of employment in the Town. Town Center businesses

include professional services such as real estate brokers, accountants, and legal services. A small number of retail and food service establishments are also present in the Town Center, though residents would like to see more. The Norfolk Public Library is also located in the Town Center directly adjacent to Norfolk Town Hill. The Town has invested in pedestrian friendly amenities in the Town Center such as wide sidewalks, lighting, and streetscape that provide safe and attractive connections to the commuter rail service.

The area around Route 115/1A has been developing as a prime location for businesses serving the region with easy access to Route 1 and I-495. The area is composed of larger lot sizes and has the Shire Industrial Park within its boundaries. The district is directly linked to Gillette Stadium and Patriot Place in Foxborough via Route 115.

## Workforce and Employment

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's On-The-Map analysis, approximately 1,519 workers come into the town of Norfolk for work, outnumbered by the 3,965 that travel outside of the town for work. Only 182 people both reside and work in the town.





Number of Jobs by Industry

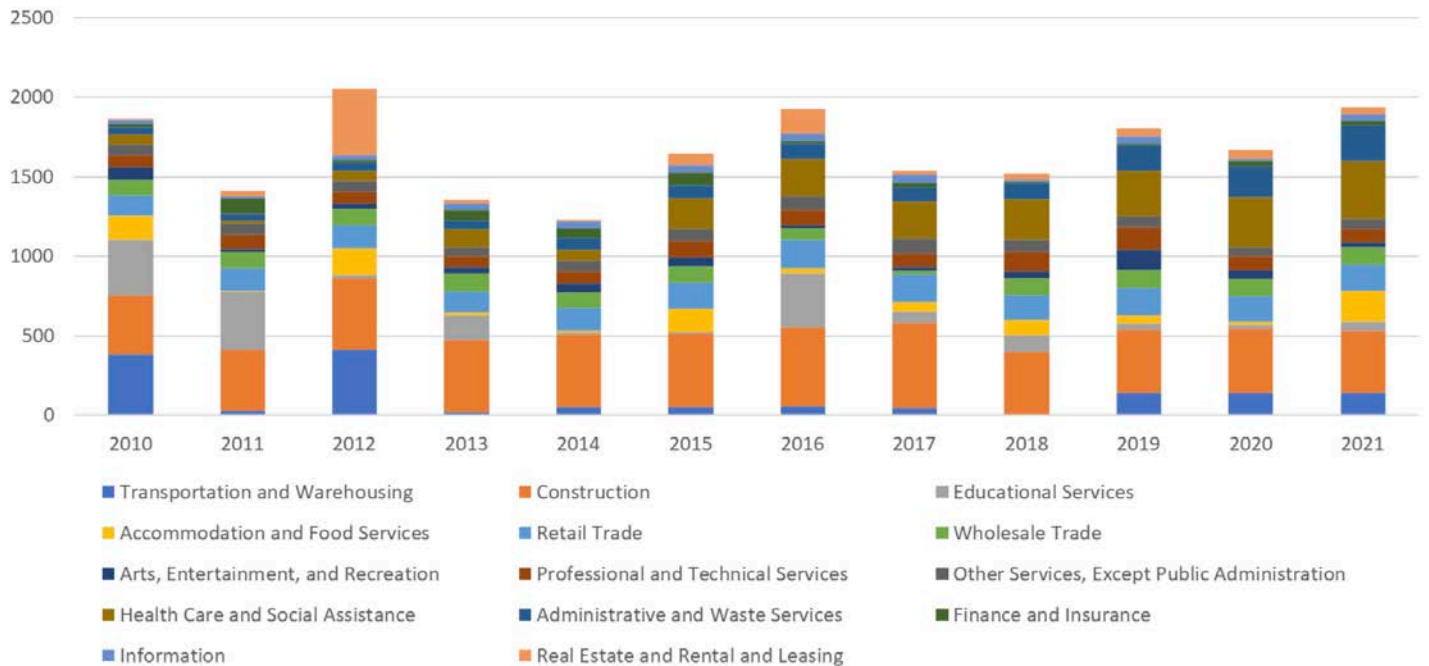


Figure 2 above illustrates the industries in which people are employed within the Town and the trends within them in terms of the change in the number of jobs over the past 10 years. The construction industry has been a consistently large employer in the Town with 392 jobs in 2021 and a 6% growth rate over the past decade. The Healthcare and Social Assistance industry is also a large source of employment in the Town employing 362 workers. It is the industry that has experienced the most growth since 2010 by growing 475% since that time. Other industries that have experienced growth over the past decade in Norfolk include Administrative and Waste Services (371%), Real Estate and Rental and Leasing (557%), and Information (111%).

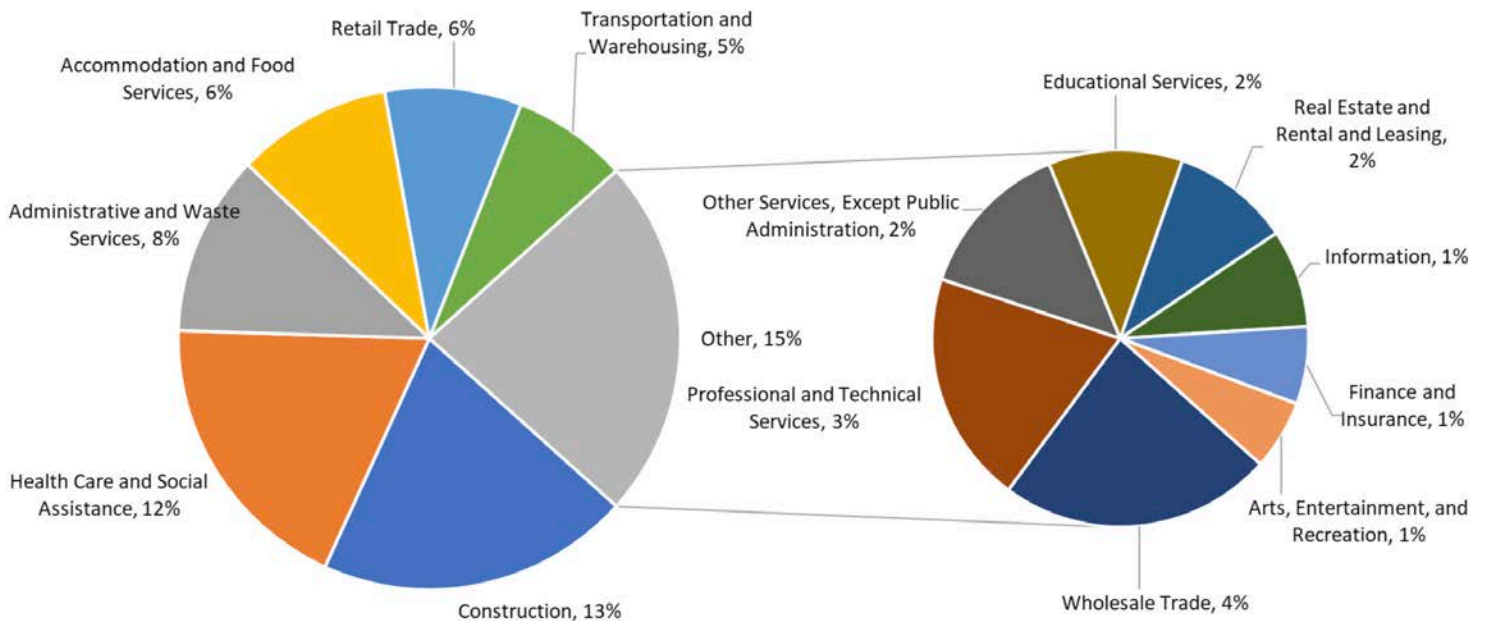
Industries that have experienced a local reduction in employment in the past ten years include Transportation and Warehousing (-63%), Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (-66%), and Other Services, Except Public Administration (-10%).

Further analysis is provided in Figure 3 below. The Transportation and Warehousing industry lost

241 jobs, declining by 63%. However, Wholesale Trade has remained stable with a 6% incline. While the Educational Services industry lost 301 jobs, with a decline of 85%, the trends for Educational Services do not follow a linear trend pattern and require further research. This declining trend, however, is also reflected in jobs in the Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation industry, which lost 53 jobs, a 66% decline from the 2010 size of 80 jobs. The Real Estate and Rental and Leasing industry experienced a 557% increase, growing from 7 jobs to 46. Given the low poverty rate, the fact that only 55% of the adult population is part of the civilian workforce, the lack of data available on overall employment rates, the growth in the Real Estate and Rental and Leasing Industry, it can be inferred to imply that many residents may potentially earn passive income from investments including real estate.

Based on the most recent data (2021) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Construction industry comprises 13% of jobs in the town, with Healthcare and Social Assistance comprising 12%.

## Distribution of Jobs by Industry 2021



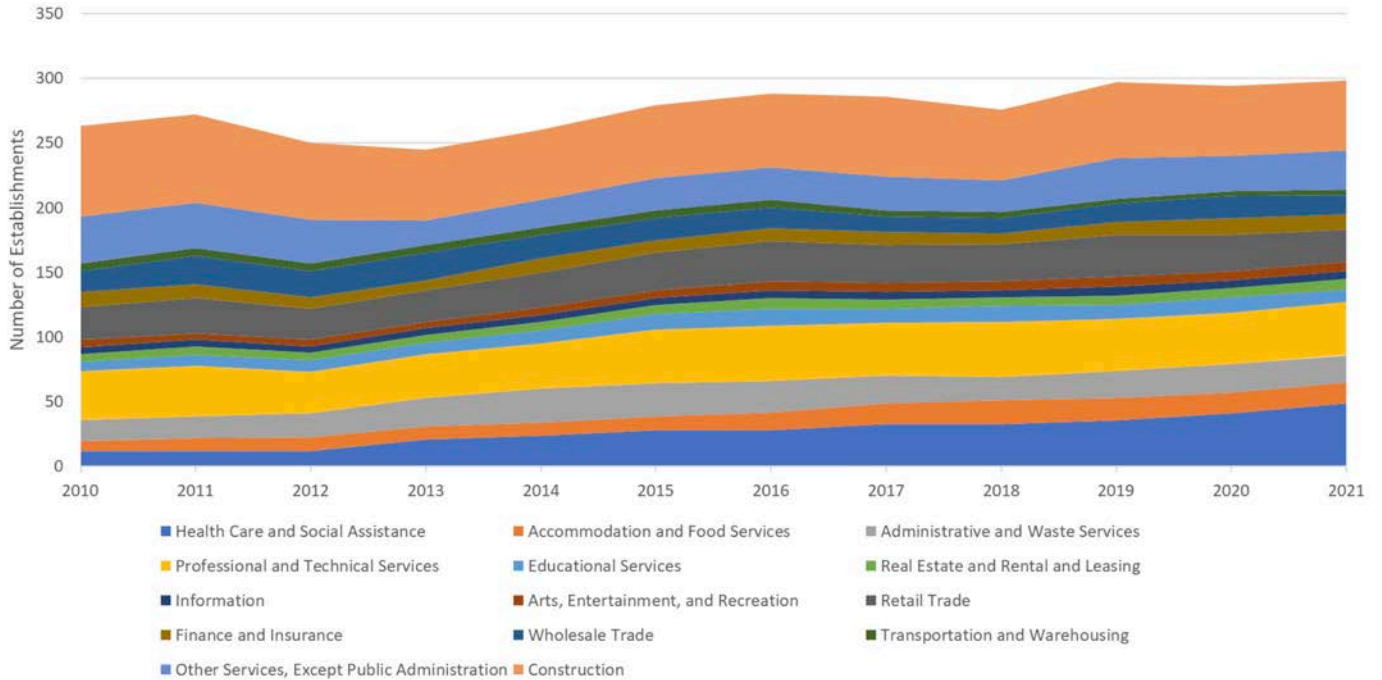
The Town appears to have growth potential as all industries reported growth in the past decade, measured in the number of establishments. The local economy, also when measured by the number of businesses located within Norfolk, is made up largely of the Construction industry. This is likely independent contractors who reside in Norfolk and work throughout the region. These are not storefront businesses driving local economic activity. They may not have the same presence in the community as a storefront business, but may possibly be capturing local construction demand.

Figure 4 on the following page provides a detailed breakdown of the trends in the number of business establishments located in the Town. There are just 324 total establishments in the Town of Norfolk, with 14% growth over the past decade adding 39 business establishments. Of the 39 new establishments, 37 of them are within the Health Care and Social Assistance industry. Construction establishments declined by 16 firms down to 54 total remaining as of 2021. The diversity of establishments across many industries is a sign of strength in the local economy as is the relatively

stable base of establishments and the general trend toward growing rather than shrinking the total number of establishments in the Town.

In addition to establishments and employment numbers, wages have also increased over the past decade in every industry. The top four industries for wages include Information, Wholesale Trade, Real Estate and Rental and Leasing, and Finance and Insurance. Each of these four industries experienced a spike in earnings in 2021 from the year prior. The increase brought earnings to well over \$2,000 per week in these industries. These increases may be related to broader labor market trends related to post-pandemic dynamics including the so-called Great Resignation that has resulted in wage growth across many industries. Other industries also saw generally consistent and modest increases for wages in Norfolk. Each of these trends can be seen in Figure 5 on the following page.

Industry Trends by Number of Establishments

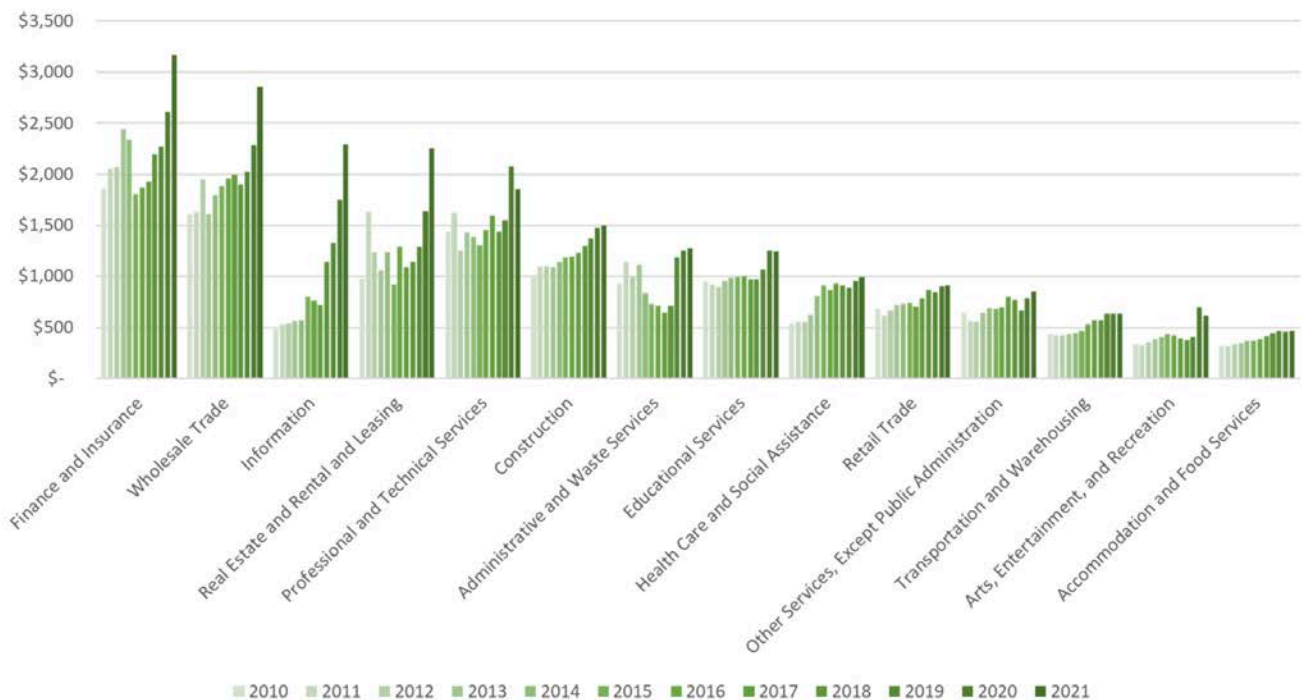


### Real Estate Overview

The Town of Norfolk has 22 industrial properties, all of which are fully occupied. They range in size between 3,000 square feet to 182,000 square feet. There are 11 office properties, with just a 1.1% average vacancy rate. The buildings range in size from 605 square feet to 211,000

square feet. There are 20 retail properties with an average vacancy rate of 0.1%, ranging in size from 2,126 square feet to 18,625 square feet. The majority of the Town is largely comprised of residential uses with single family ownership properties being the vast majority of the residential property.

Average Weekly Wages by Industry



In addition to Town Center and Route 115/1A areas, the River’s Edge area includes higher density residential and mixed-use commercial and the former Buckley Mann property near Franklin provides additional opportunities for economic development and investment in the Town. Feedback from the Norfolk Small Business Association indicated that the low vacancy rates and limited commercial properties make it difficult to open or expand new businesses in Norfolk.

## Norfolk Small Business Association (NSBA)

The Norfolk Small Business Association (NSBA) is a nonpolitical, nonprofit organization comprised of small business owners and self-employed individuals who reside or conduct business in the Town of Norfolk, Massachusetts.

The Mission of the NSBA is to unite, educate, support and empower small businesses in Norfolk, MA. The organization provides resources, events, opportunities for growth, and networking to small business owners. The NSBA hosts an annual Norfolk Discovery Day in September. Its goal is to grow membership in conjunction with giving back to the community through networking, community events, and continuing education for all small business owners. The Town of Norfolk has begun collaborating with the NSBA in 2023 to advance shared economic development goals.

## Local Taxes

The tax burden on residents is voiced as a frequent concern among residents in previous planning processes and in the current Master Plan’s community engagement activities. The most recent data from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue shows that residential real estate taxes are the primary source of revenue for the Town at 72%. Non-property taxes are the second largest contributor to the Town’s revenue at 22%. Non-property taxes are generally assessed on furniture, fixtures, equipment and inventory of a corporation used in conduct of the business.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue Division of Local Services, the FY2022 average single family tax bill in Norfolk is \$9,750. The average across the Commonwealth is lower at \$6,724. The average single family tax bills in abutting municipalities include Franklin (\$7,121), Medway (\$8,078), Millis (\$8,734), Medfield (\$12,555), Walpole (\$8,551), Foxborough (\$7,458), and Wrentham (\$7,177). Norfolk is the second highest among its neighboring municipalities. Since Wellesley has been mentioned by community members a few times, its average single family tax bill is \$16,889.

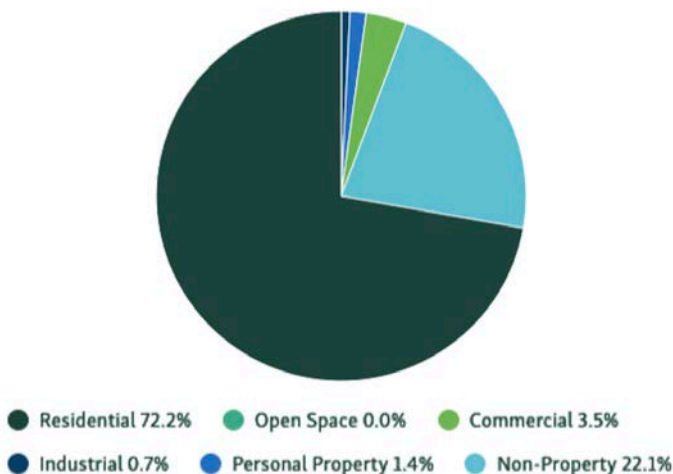
## Other Considerations

Additional exploration of other indicators of economic health such as business vitality and retention would be helpful if data is available.

Public feedback indicated that Norfolk’s commercial regulations - mainly through zoning and permitting - are burdensome and difficult to navigate. The Town and NSBA are working to address this, with the first priority centering on updating Norfolk’s signage bylaw.

Norfolk, like all of Greater Boston, is vulnerable to climate change impacts, including an increased frequency of extreme weather events. The economic impacts of these events and disruptions should be a part of future considerations for goals and strategies.

Share of Tax Revenue by Source



Source: MA Dept. of Revenue Years: 2016



## Topic Brief

# Land Use

### Quick Facts

- 42% of Norfolk's land area is residential, making residential the primary land use.
- Near the geographic center of the Town is the central business district (B-1) of the Town Center. This district includes commercial uses and a mix of other uses including residential. Norfolk's Commuter Rail station is also located in this district.
- South along Route 115 from Town Center is the Town's largest cluster of commercial properties including the commercially zoned districts at the intersection of Route 115 and Route 1A and the former Southwood Hospital property.
- Many of the Town's open space resources are distributed throughout the Town approximately a half mile radius from the Town Center and include public parks and playgrounds, private conservation areas, Chapter 61 properties, and State-owned properties.

### Key Issues

- Residents are concerned about the type, scale, and location of future growth and how public services will keep pace with it.
- Growth will continue to occur, but the largest and densest development will likely occur outside of the Town's control through 40B.
- Growth patterns with predominantly lower density residential will present long term challenges for maintenance of less efficient roadway, water, and other infrastructure systems.
- Some opportunities for non-residential or mixed-use growth, but face barriers with limited infrastructure and market support.

# Land Use

## Introduction

Norfolk's land use patterns are well-defined and generally follow a traditional pattern with a transit-served and walkable mixed-use Town Center geographically near the Town's center. The Town Center is a destination for a number of uses and services in the Town. The center is surrounded by residential uses of higher density and that density decreases as distance from the Town Center increases. This general pattern results in land uses across the Town that are relatively predictable and uniform. The Town has evolved from being historically predominantly agricultural to predominantly residential today. Even though agricultural uses have decreased over time, residents view the Town character as rural and agricultural. A few other nodes of non-residential or mixed-use activity occur throughout the Town outside of the Town Center. The largest of these nodes is at and around the intersection of Route 1A and Route 115. This area includes commercial, municipal, and residential uses. The former Southwood Hospital property, which represents a large redevelopment opportunity in the Town, is just to the north of this intersection. The other nodes include the River's Edge mixed use development on the northern side of Route 115 and the former mill site on Lawrence Street in the western portion of the Town known as the Buckley & Mann property.

## Regional Context

The Town of Norfolk is a small town with a semi-rural community feel. It is a suburban community in the Greater Boston Region located in Norfolk County, Massachusetts. The Town is within the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's (MAPC) region, the largest regional planning agency in the Commonwealth. MAPC divides the Greater Boston region into eight subregions. The Town of Norfolk is in the South West Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP) subregion with eight other towns. MAPC categorizes Norfolk as a Maturing New England Town. These communities are typically characterized by a mixed-use town center surrounded by compact neighborhoods. They have

a relatively large amount of vacant developable land, and new growth typically comes in the form of new residential subdivisions. This type of community is among the most rapidly growing in the Greater Boston region.

Norfolk is surrounded by the Towns of Franklin and Medway to its west, Millis and Medfield to its north, Walpole and Foxborough to its east, and Wrentham to its south. It is about 45 minutes from Boston via I-95 and I-93 north and about 45 minutes to Providence Rhode Island via I-95 south.

Norfolk is located within the Upper Watershed of the Charles River. The Mill River in Norfolk flows north as a tributary into the Charles River flowing into Bush Pond and City Mills Pond in the Town. Stony Brook is another important waterbody in the Town flowing into the Stony Brook Reservoir and Kingfisher Pond. Another Charles River tributary, the Stop River flows north through the Town flowing into Mann Pond and Highland Park just as it meets the northern Town line.

From a transportation perspective, many residents have been attracted to the Town because of its rail connectivity to Boston with a commuter rail stop in the center of Town Center on the Franklin/Foxboro Line. Norfolk is not directly connected to the major regional highways of Interstate 95 or Interstate 495, or State Route 1. The numbered State Routes in the Town include Route 1A and Route 115. This transportation context has been a benefit for the Town in aiding the preservation of the semi-rural character and small-town feel. It has also been a contributing factor in the sometimes-difficult nature of attracting non-residential investment in the Town. A regional greenway project is proposed to connect communities along the abandoned Old Colony Railroad corridor from Walpole to North Attleboro with a modest portion running through Norfolk near Route 1A.

Norfolk is connected directly to its subregion and other unique aspects sharing some municipal services and school facilities with neighboring municipalities. King Philip is a regional secondary

school district serving the towns of Norfolk, Plainville, and Wrentham. Firefighters and Emergency Medical Technician (EMS) response is shared between neighboring municipalities with Norfolk and surrounding municipalities (Franklin, Mendon, Millville, Plainville, and Wrentham) assisting with emergency response through the Metacomet Emergency Communications Center.

## Historical Land Use Patterns

For thousands of years, the land of the Greater Boston area, including the present-day boundaries of the Town of Norfolk was cared for and cultivated by the Native American tribes that predated European colonization. In the area of Norfolk, these tribes included the Massachusett, Nipmuck, and Wampanoag. Prior to European colonization, in 1600, it is believed that there were about 3,000 Massachusett, 500 Nipmuc, and 2,400 Wampanoag Native Americans in the Commonwealth ([historyofmassachusetts.org](http://historyofmassachusetts.org)).

In 1636 a tract of land to the east and south of the Charles River was granted to 12 European colonist men for the sake of “planting a town.” The town was requested to be called Contentment, but the name given to it was Dedham. This original Dedham land consisted of the present-day boundaries of the towns of Dedham, Medfield, Medway, Wrentham, Norfolk, Walpole, Franklin, Bellingham, Dover, Norwood, Needham, Natick, and portions Sherborn and Boston (Hyde Park). At this time the area of Wrentham and Norfolk was referred to as Wollomonopoag. In 1660 settlement in Wollomonopoag was recommended to the Dedham selectmen by a search committee deputized to search and view Native American lands within the settlement. In 1661 Dedham town meeting voted to sell all uplands and meadows at Wollomonopoag to set up a plantation. In 1662, a Native American title to Wollomonopoag was purchased from King Philip. In 1673 the General Court granted a new town independence from Dedham under the name of Wrentham. In 1675 King Philip’s War commenced and lasted two years destroying much of the settlement that had occurred. (Town website, “History of Norfolk”

and the “Norfolk Timeline Project” by the Norfolk Historical Commission)

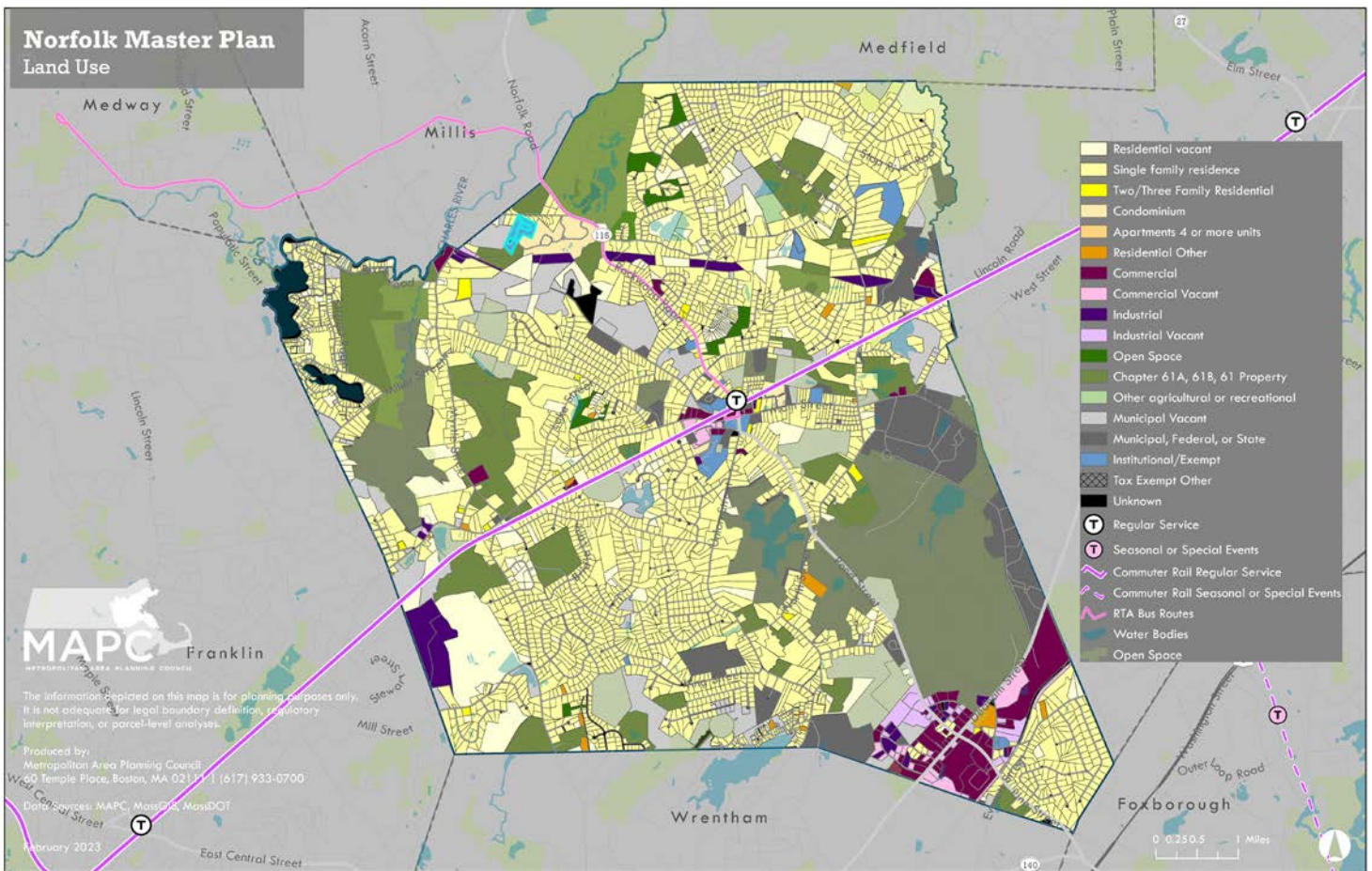
A number of mills were in operation or being planned in the area by 1694 in an area then known as North Wrentham. By the 1740s the population had grown substantially with a large group living in North Wrentham. The 1800s saw an expansion of factories and mills, and an increase in population in the area. The first railroad line into the Town, operated by the Norfolk County Railroad, opened in 1848. By the 1860s North Wrentham was functioning as its own town. A meetinghouse was constructed at the top of the town hill. It would become the Town Hall of Norfolk in 1870. North Wrentham and portions of Franklin, Walpole, and Medway were organized into Norfolk with an initial population of 1,124 residents.

The Town Hill and Town Center have always been a central feature of the Town. The Town’s tributary rivers and lakes played a critical role in attracting factories and mills. Pastures and farmland were also a prominent part of the Town’s early features. Over the years farmed pastures, upland forests, and other open spaces have been developed mostly as single family home residential subdivisions. According to permitting data, over the past 41 years (1980-2021) the Town has seen production of 2,021 housing units, averaging 50 units per year.

## Existing Land Use

The patterns of land use in the Town are listed below by percentage of land area. The most common land use in the Town is single family residential. This is followed by Municipal, Federal, or State land and property protected under the Chapter 61 program. The full accounting of land use percentages are:

- Single family residence is 42%
- Municipal, Federal, or State is 17.3%
- Chapter 61A, 61BN, 61 Property is 11.6%
- Municipal vacant is 9.3%
- Residential vacant is 7.2%



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- Blank (no use listed) is 4.4%
- Commercial is 2.4%
- Industrial is 1.4%
- Institutional/Exempt is 0.9%
- Open Space is 0.7%
- Condominium is 0.6%
- Commercial vacant is 0.6%

Industrial Vacant, Tax Exempt Other, Residential Other, Two/Three Family Residential, NA, Apartments 4 or more units, and Other Agricultural or Recreational are all less than 0.5% each

## Chapter 61 Parcels

Norfolk has a total of 50 parcels protected under Chapter 61. Chapter 61, the Forestland Taxation Act in Massachusetts, requires that municipalities reduce assessments of forest land when a landowner is enrolled and observes the Chapter

61 program requirements for land conservation. These parcels are protected for conservation under this tax program and total 1,083 acres of protected land in the Town.

In the 2007 Master Plan a total of 29 parcels were noted as protected under Chapter 61 for a total of 475.97 acres of protected land in the Town. The Town has more than doubled the land area protected under Chapter 61 over that 16 year period.

## Zoning Bylaw

The Norfolk Zoning Bylaw describes the regulations that are applied to parcels of land in the Town. The Zoning Bylaw divides the Town into zoning districts and each district regulates the uses that can occur on a property within the district. The zoning also describes the intensity of development that can occur through building setbacks, building height, open space requirements, and parking



requirements. These regulations shape the built environment of the town and the location and mix of uses that can occur across the community.

## Zoning Bylaw

The Town Zoning Bylaw establishes eleven base (underlying) zoning districts. Three of the eleven base zoning districts are residential districts (R-1, R-2, R-3). Three of the eleven base zoning districts are business districts (B-1, B-3, B-4). Five of the eleven base zoning districts are commercial districts (C-1, C-3, C-4, C-5, C-6).

The Zoning Map illustrates the location of eleven base (underlying) zoning districts. The underlying base zoning districts on the zoning map include additional subdistricts in B-1 and C-1 districts to bring the total Zoning Codes in the legend to 16 including B-1, B-1 Out, B-3, B-4, C-1, C-1A, C-1B, C-1C, C-1D, C-3, C-4, C-5, C-6, R-1, R-2, R-3.

A brief description of each of the thirteen base zoning districts follows outlining the general purpose and a summary of allowed uses or other characteristics in each district.

### Base Underlying Zoning Districts Residence Zoning Districts

Residence Zoning Districts (R-1, R-2, R-3) allow single-family dwellings by right and conversion of single-family dwellings into two-family dwellings by special permit. No multi-family or mixed-use structures are allowed in Residence districts. Note that multi-family has been developed in residence districts through the Commonwealth's 40B Comprehensive Permit regulations which establish a process for a developer to override local zoning regulations.

The R-1 zoning district covers about 1,818 acres of land in the Town which represents 18.5% of the Town's land area. The R-1 is the least restrictive of the residence zones with a minimum lot size of 30,000 square feet (less than one acre).

The R-2 zoning district covers about 2,098 acres of land in the Town which represents 21.3% of the Town's land area. The R-2 requires a minimum lot

size of 43,560 (1 acre).

The R-3 zoning district covers about 4,273 acres of land in the Town which represents 43.4% of the Town's land area. The R-3 is the most restrictive of the residence zones with a minimum lot size of 55,000 square feet (more than one acre).

The most land area in the Town is covered by the R-3 zoning district. The three residential zoning districts combine to cover 83.1% of the Town.

### Business Zoning Districts

The Town has three business districts including B-1, B-3, and B-4. Mixed use is allowed by right only in the Town Center B-1 district. The B-1 Zone Area is 41.4 acres or 0.4% Town land area. The B-1 Out Zone is 77.6 acres or 0.8% Town land area. The Town Center is geographically at the center of the Town and includes the Town's commuter rail stop. The B-3 Zone Area is 6.5 acres or 0.1% of Town land area. The B-4 Zone Area is 6.0 acres or 0.1% of Town land area.

### Commercial Zoning Districts

The remaining 16.9% of the Town is comprised of the non-residential zoning districts. The largest is the C-5 district at 10.2% land area. The only other nonresidential district higher than 1% of land area is C-4 at 1.4%. All other nonresidential districts are 1% or less land area of the Town. The C-1 Zone Area is 93.8 acres or 1.0% Town land area. The C-1a Zone Area is 47.0 acres or 0.5% Town land area. The C-1b Zone Area is 86.8 acres or 0.9% Town land area. The C-1c Zone Area is 22.7 acres or 0.2% Town land area. The C-1d Zone Area is 36.7 acres or 0.4% Town land area. The C-3 Zone Area is 4.2 acres or 0.0% Town land area. The C-4 Zone Area is 140.7 acres or 1.4% Town land area. The C-5 Zone Area is 1,009.8 acres or 10.2% Town land area. The C-6 Zone Area is 89.5 acres or 0.9% Town land area.

### Overlay Districts

In addition to the underlying base zoning districts, the Town also has five overlay districts which add regulations to the base zoning districts where they

apply. The overlay districts include the Flood Plain District, Watershed Protection District, Aquifer and Water Supply and Interim Wellhead Protection Districts, Adult Business Overlay District, and Wireless Communications Districts.

The Flood Plain Protection District (previously called the Flood Plain – Wetlands Protection District) prevents the construction of new buildings and structures on any lands which are seasonally or periodically subject to flooding. The purpose of this district is twofold – to protect the health and safety of Norfolk residents from flooding, and to protect and preserve the natural environment from future contamination.

## Other Regulations

### Open Space Preservation Development

For underlying Residence Zones, an Open Space Preservation Development allows a 10% increase in the number of allowable building lots with other open space and development requirements by special permit.

Beyond this district, the town allows Planned Multi-Lot Residential Developments in its C-4 Mixed Use District (Route 115 and Holbrook Street) with a minimum lot size of 8,000 square feet per unit. PMLDs are also allowed in Norfolk's C-6 District (located along Dedham Street in the southeast corner of the Town) by Special Permit through the Planning Board.

The Wetlands Protection Bylaw works in cooperation with the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act providing more specific and stringent restrictions in those areas which are specific to the needs of the community.

The Stormwater Management Bylaw was amended in 2021 and now requires Low Impact Development site strategies and more stringent pollution and runoff controls for new developments which create impervious surfaces and redevelopments which increase impervious surfaces.

Norfolk requires between 10 and 20 percent

affordable units in developments of six or more dwelling units.

## Recent Development Patterns

Norfolk has experienced moderate growth since the previous master plan in 2007. Most of the growth has been residential. Permitting data shows 2,101 residential units were completed since 1980, an average of 50 units per year. 40B subdivisions have been more prevalent than conventional subdivisions. Seven 40B development projects are in the development pipeline. A total of 53 units are anticipated to be added to Norfolk's Subsidized Housing Inventory based on recent 40B activity (from HPP). The most recent development projects are listed below.

The Enclave, located on Village Green (formerly the Boy Scout Land) is under construction with market rate and affordable units. Forty condominium units are being constructed. Ten of those units could go on the SHI.

The Village at Norfolk is under construction with market rate and affordable units. This development will create thirty-two single-family market-rate ownership units and eight affordable units.

Construction at Lakeland Farms (84 Cleveland Street) is complete, but units are yet to be added to the SHI. This development will produce 32 market-rate ownership units (mix of 2- and 3-bedrooms) and 8 affordable units.

Marini Meetinghouse construction is complete. This development has 20 two-bedroom market-rate ownership units and 5 affordable to be added to the SHI.

The Residences at Pine Street (35 Pine Street) has been approved, but is not yet under construction. It will include 8 total single-family homes with 2 affordable units to be added to the SHI.

The Residences at Norfolk Station is a (non-age restricted) permitted (but not yet constructed) 36-unit condominium development, with a mix of 1-,

2-, and 3-bedroom units, including 9 SHI units.

Lakeland Hills (Seekonk Street) is a 44-unit ownership single and two-family home development with 11 units to be added to SHI. The development is approved, but not yet under construction.

In addition, the Town has identified five sites in Town Center where comprehensive permit applications are encouraged.

## Future Opportunities and Constraints

Future development opportunities have been identified across the Town including mixed-use development of vacant parcels in the Town Center, continued commercial development at the intersection of Route 1A and 115, remediation and redevelopment of the Southwood Hospital property, and remediation and redevelopment of the Buckley Mann property.

The lack of public sewer infrastructure is a development constraint which places limitations on the density and scale of potential future development. The Town has been investigating the potential for the expansion of district wastewater treatment in the Town Center.

The continued efforts to address compliance with stormwater regulations and management is important given the numerous water resources and anticipated impacts of climate change. Flooding due to storm events will increase in the future. Investments in Town-wide stormwater infrastructure, regulations, and best practices will continue to address this growing concern and constraint.

Modifying the Zoning Bylaw to be compliant with Section 3A “MBTA Communities” requirements presents a future opportunity for residential development that aligns with the Town’s recent housing production plan. The Town has been exploring the updates necessary to bring areas near the Town Center into compliance while remaining consistent with the Town’s goals for

a more vibrant, mixed-use and walkable Town Center.

## Potential Build-out Analysis

The previous Norfolk Master Plan (2007) reported that the town had approximately 3,000 acres of undeveloped residentially zoned land that could result in several hundred additional homes and increase the Town’s population by approximately 3,000 residents. The commercial-business districts at that time had a combined undeveloped area of 180 acres.

The previous Master Plan calculated a full build-out, estimating that the residential population of the Town could increase by 1,650 by the years 2017-2027. Norfolk’s population in 2006 was 9,534 for a total projected full build-out of 11,184. In the 2020 U.S. Census the Town’s population was 11,662. However, the Town would not be considered fully built-out today.

Build-out and population projections can be calculated, but the term “full build-out” is misleading. No community is fully built-out, communities are constantly evolving and new investment occurs on private property in response to market conditions, regulatory conditions, and the value of land. As a general trend of land development, as the value of land increases and land becomes more scarce, the density of development on the land will increase. This trend of redevelopment and densification undermines the idea that a community can be fully built-out or that once a certain capacity is reached all development will stop.

## Potential Future Land Uses

In 2000, MAPC, under contract to the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, prepared a build-out analysis for every community in the Boston region. A build-out analysis is a tool to help communities understand the potential impacts of future growth that might occur given the amount of developable land remaining and how that land is zoned.

The build-out was based on available land within

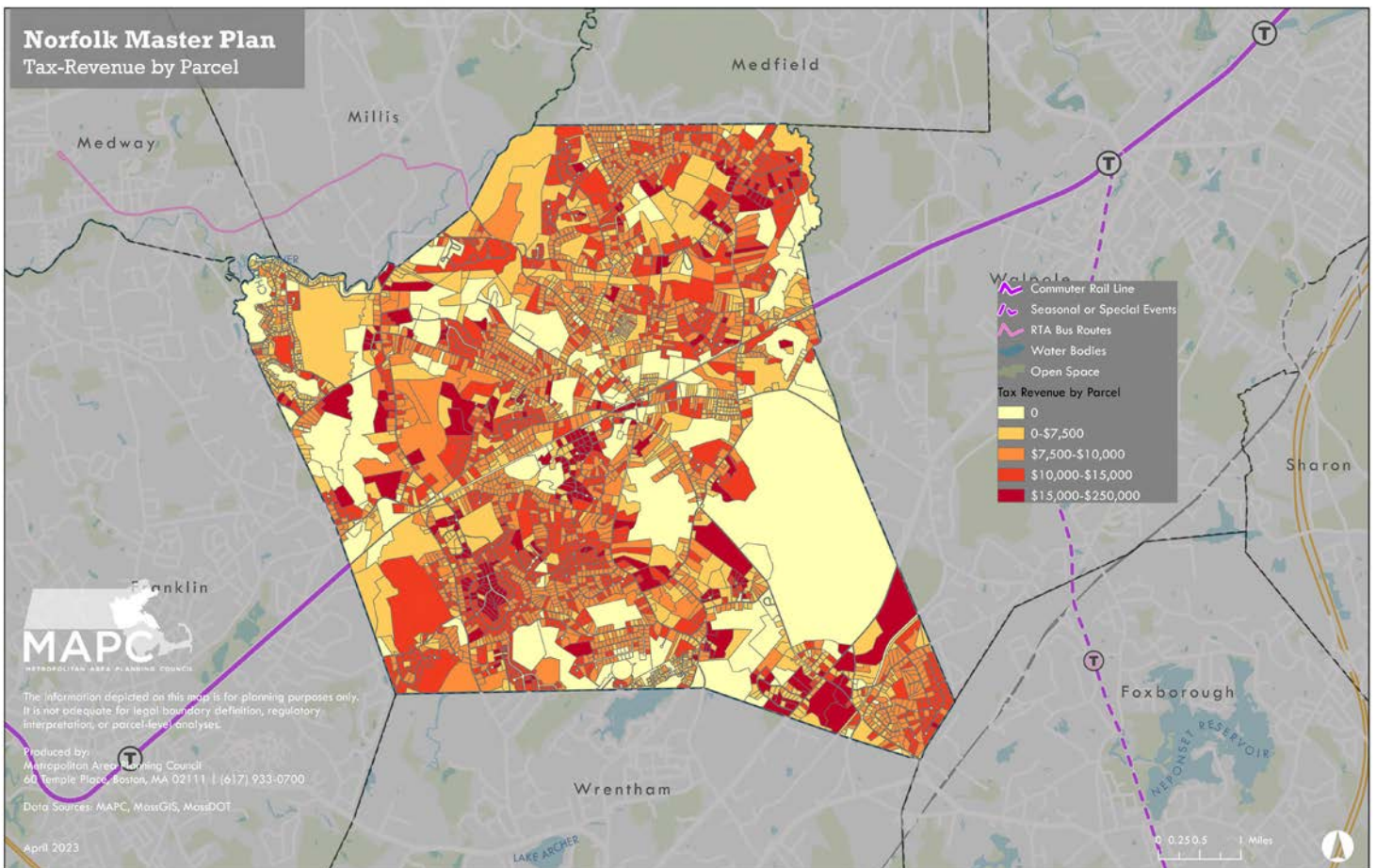
each zoning district and it estimates the number of additional housing units and commercial development that could be accommodated. Generally, the projections account only for as-of-right development.

Currently parcels with a land use code of “residential vacant” total 7.2% of the Town’s land area or 711 acres. Land coded as “commercial vacant” is 0.6% of the Town’s land area or 62 acres. Land coded as “municipal vacant” is 9.3% of the Town’s land area or 918 acres. Land coded as “industrial vacant” is 0.5% of the Town’s land area or 52.6 acres. Land coded as “NA” (not applicable) or “blank” is 4.4% of the Town’s land area or 437 acres. All together these coded lands may be comparable to previous estimates of vacant land in the Town of Norfolk. In total these codes add to 2,180 acres. 16 years ago, the 2007 Master Plan estimated a total of 3,000 vacant lands.

## Real Estate Taxes

The tax burden on residents is a frequently cited concern in the Norfolk community. The majority of the tax revenue of the Town is from residential property taxes. The next largest source of tax revenue is non-property taxes, followed by commercial property taxes, personal property taxes, and industrial property taxes.

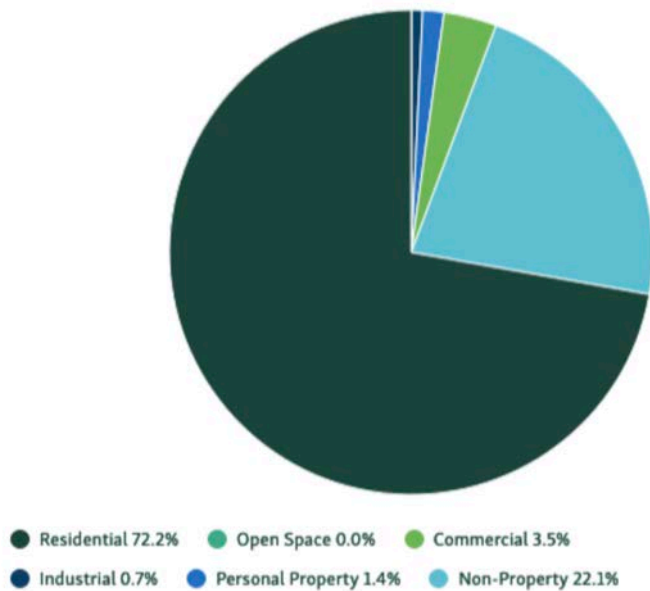
According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue Division of Local Services, the FY2022 average single family tax bill in Norfolk is \$9,750. The average across the Commonwealth is lower at \$6,724. The average single family tax bills in abutting municipalities include Franklin (\$7,121), Medway (\$8,078), Millis (\$8,734), Medfield (\$12,555), Walpole (\$8,551), Foxborough (\$7,458), and Wrentham (\$7,177). Norfolk is the second highest among its neighboring municipalities. Since Wellesley has been mentioned



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by community members a few times, its average single family tax bill is \$16,889.

### Share of Tax Revenue by Source



Source: MA Dept. of Revenue Years: 2016

## Other Considerations

The Greater Boston area is vulnerable to climate change impacts, including an increased frequency of extreme weather events. Land use and development patterns should be considered for future flood risk with low impact development techniques and stormwater systems that will better accommodate increased frequency and volume of storm events.

Land conservation tools should be explored for use in Norfolk to encourage thoughtful growth including open space subdivision regulations, transfer of development rights, accessory dwelling units, or other regulatory or development tools to increase the efficiency of developable and previously developed land.

Ensure sustained funding for a full-time or shared staff position to assist with housing specifically, as indicated in the Housing Production Plan.



## Topic Brief

# Housing

### Quick Facts

- 2,967 households; average 3.1 persons per household
- \$168,281 median household income, which is about 1.5 times the amount in Norfolk County (\$112,089) and nearly double the amount in Massachusetts (\$89,026)
- 3,111 housing units, of which 95% are occupied.
- 96% of all housing is single-family. 4% is multi-unit. This is extremely low compared to Norfolk County (37%) and Massachusetts (42%). There are no multi-family buildings with over 10 units.
- 96% of homes are owner-occupied. Only 4% of units are rented, which is significantly lower than Norfolk County (32%) and Massachusetts (38%).
- \$563,800 median value of owner-occupied homes. Median cost of single-family home
- 25% of households spend more than 30% of their household income on housing costs, meaning they are potentially cost-burdened. Of these, about half earn less than 80% of Area Median Income (AMI).
- 151 units (4.2% of all units) on Subsidized Housing Inventory. Unique to Norfolk, the majority are ownership, rather than rental.
- Norfolk has adopted several housing tools that can help to increase housing choices and address local needs. These include:
  - Norfolk Affordable Housing Trust, which was established in 2006.
  - Adoption of the Community Preservation Act in 2001; with over \$11 million in revenue

### Key Issues

- As sale prices and other housing costs have increased tremendously, it has made it challenging for households with fixed or lower incomes to afford to stay in Norfolk. Only households with generous incomes are able to move to Norfolk, given the majority of the Town's housing stock is comprised of large single-family detached homes.
- Very few rental options exist in Norfolk, making it challenging for recent high school or college graduates to stay or return to Norfolk and seniors looking to downsize have few options. Because of the limited stock, there are often no vacancies, creating a tight and competitive market for the low supply.
- Norfolk has been successful in expanding affordable homeownership options, but there is still a need for more affordable housing as costs continue to increase and older residents transition to fixed incomes.
- Very few small (studio or 1-bedroom) housing options (only 4%), which is a mismatch with household size – where nearly half of households have 1- to 2-people.
- Given Norfolk's development constraints and limited transportation network, it is critical that new housing is located in strategic locations, near existing infrastructure and amenities, where future transportation improvements (such as improved commuter rail, new sidewalks or bike paths, or local on-demand transit options) can serve new households.

# Housing

## Introduction

In 2022, Norfolk completed a Housing Production Plan (HPP) that comprehensively assessed the current housing stock, housing need, market conditions, and development constraints and opportunities to increase housing options. The Housing Production Plan established goals and strategies for Norfolk to implement over the next five years to meet the housing needs of Norfolk residents, particularly those with lower incomes; influence the type, amount, and location of mixed-income and Affordable housing; meet the State-mandated goal of having at least 10% of homes qualify for inclusion on the Subsidized Housing Inventory<sup>1</sup>; and until that 10% is met, better control for potential 40B developments. Because the Housing Production Plan was completed just prior to undertaking the Master Plan Update, the Housing element relies heavily on this focused housing effort and considers opportunities to round out the HPP findings and goals in the context of other Master Plan elements and refine with additional public feedback and ideas gathered as part of the Master Planning process.

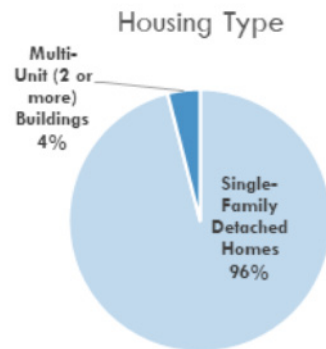
## Norfolk's Housing Stock

In 2020, Norfolk has 3,587 housing units. Norfolk has seen moderate housing growth over the last two decades, growing by about 25%.



Source: US Census Bureau

Norfolk is comprised of 2,967 households, with an average household size of 3.13 persons. 1,310 households have children under the age of 18 years old. About 40% of households have one or more people aged 60 years or over.



Of the 3,587 homes in Norfolk, 96% are single-family (includes both detached and attached townhomes). Only 4% are in multi-unit structures. Looking a little more closely, only 2% are in 2-4 unit structures and another 2% are in 5-9 unit structures. The lack of water and sewer infrastructure and restrictive zoning has likely limited larger multi-family structures from developing.

The split in housing tenure is also similar, where 96% of homes are owner-occupied, while approximately 4% are renter-occupied. Slightly less than half of the housing stock was built pre-1980.

## Norfolk's Housing Production Plan (HPP)

The Norfolk Housing Production Plan (HPP), completed in Fall 2022, relied on quantitative housing data, primarily from the US Census Bureau and American Community, to assess current conditions and demand. While there was public engagement as part of this planning process, it is important to continue to consider how Norfolk residents' experiences compare to community statistics, and through the Master Plan, the Town will be able to further augment the technical analysis provided by the HPP with personal housing experiences of Norfolk residents.

The Housing Production Plan includes seven goals to accommodate Norfolk's housing needs, which have been noted below. Additional context and considerations, relevant for the Master Planning process, are noted to help connect these established goals to potential new goals that may

be included in the Master Plan.

The first goal supports the creation of 80 new deed-restricted Affordable homes for households earning low or moderate incomes over the next five years. It is intended that these homes will be added to the Subsidized Housing Inventory.

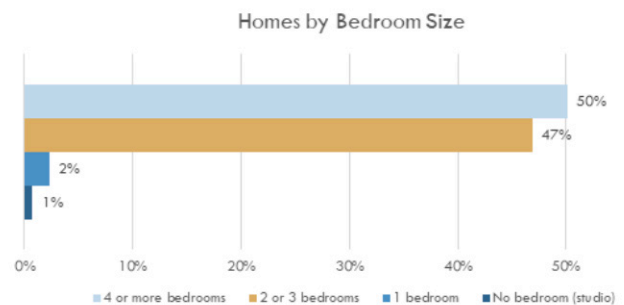
Since the HPP was adopted, the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) released the updated Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), based on 2020 Census year-round housing unit counts. Norfolk's share of units on the SHI decreased from 6% (187 units) to 4.2% (151 units).

The HPP noted that based on 2010 SHI counts, Norfolk needed to add at least 16 new homes annually over the next eight years to reach the Town's 10% goal. This number is even larger now. The Master Plan offers an opportunity to refine goals to create more deed-restricted Affordable housing. The Town should consider the importance of providing affordable housing – it is not simply to comply with the 10% goal but also about providing housing options that allow current Norfolk residents (like seniors on fixed incomes) to remain in Town as housing costs rapidly increase and allows for new residents who cannot afford Norfolk today to move here in the future. When a community has deed-restricted Affordable housing available for households earning less, that guarantees that households will keep housing costs below 30% of their income, freeing up financial resources for other purposes, like saving for emergencies or future homeownership and meeting other needs like health care, food, and transportation. Despite having a high median household income (\$168,281), about a quarter of households pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs. 530 households potentially qualify for Affordable Housing.

The second HPP goal recognizes that as Norfolk's population grows and changes, housing needs also change. The goal calls for Norfolk to address these changing local needs by promoting a variety of housing options as alternatives to single-family

homes.

Norfolk's current housing stock is almost wholly single-family homes (96%), which are often larger and much more expensive to purchase. First-time homebuyers would need a substantial down payment or large household income to be able to afford to live in Norfolk. Because of the limited choices of housing types, Norfolk is de facto unwelcoming to people who may want or need smaller homes like apartments, condos, or two-family dwellings. Given that about half of Norfolk's households are one- or two-person households, it also seems possible that many Norfolk residents have houses much larger than they would prefer, but they have limited options to downsize in Norfolk, if they want to remain in the community. Another consideration is considering as residents age, they desire downsizing to decrease housing costs, lessen the work associated with property upkeep, or increase proximity to neighbors (e.g., cottage cluster type developments where there is shared common space for people to gather more easily and frequently). Umass Donahue projects a quarter of Norfolk's population will be over the age of 65 by 2040, and these older Norfolk residents may be forced to choose between staying in a home larger than what they need or moving to a different community with housing choices better suited to their changing lifestyles.



Fifty percent of homes in Norfolk have 4 or more bedrooms. An additional 47% have 2-3 bedrooms. Smaller units, that would naturally be more affordable, represent a mere 3% of the current housing stock.

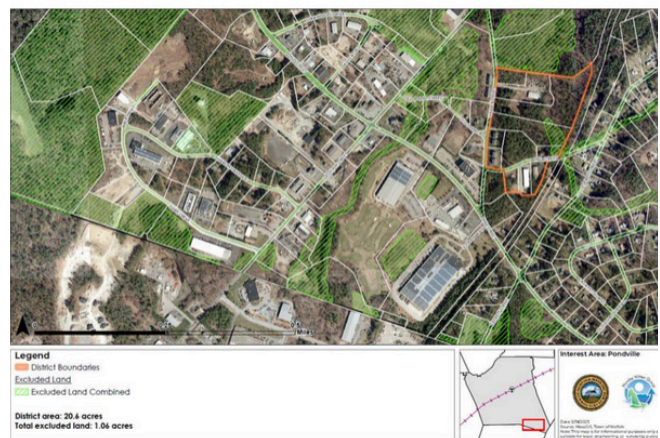


Aside from the lack of diversity in types of homes in Norfolk, there is even less diversity when it comes to rental options. Only 4% of housing units are rented, which is significantly lower than Norfolk County (32%) and Massachusetts (38%). Rental housing provides a much-needed housing options for those less suited to homeownership based on their life stage – from recent high school or college graduates and young professionals saving for a down payment to older residents who no longer want the maintenance burden that comes with homeownership, particularly larger homes on larger residential lots like what is common in Norfolk.

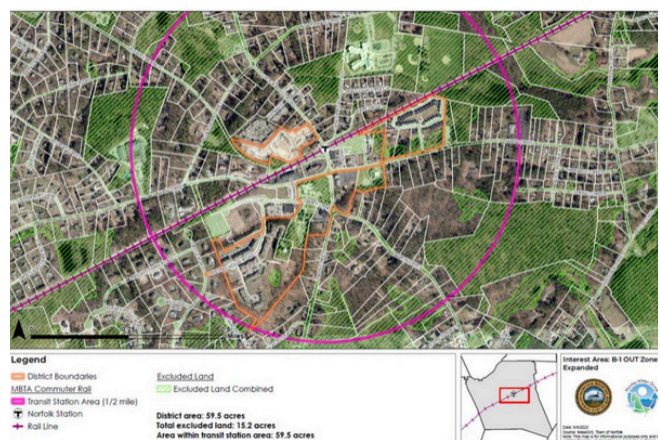
Through the spring and summer engagement events associated with the Master Plan, Norfolk residents have continued to reaffirm the importance of targeting new housing growth in strategic locations and balancing new growth with infrastructure. This aligns with the Housing Production Goal 3: Minimize impacts of new development by promoting new housing options in strategic locations and through reuse opportunities and Goal 5: Promote commercial and residential development to increase vibrancy in the Town Center. Norfolk has already been strategically planning for housing and job growth in key areas of town, to maximize infrastructure investments and preserve the rural and conservation areas in the outlying areas of Norfolk. The B-1 rezoning effort, approved in 2021, updated zoning in Town Center to encourage more mixed-use and residential development near the train station. This zoning effort complements municipal investments in wastewater treatment plants to ensure new growth is adequately served. Focusing new housing growth in Town Center will also support existing and future businesses and locate more people near Town Hill where community events are a townwide draw. The Housing Production Plan also identified the Southwood Hospital Site and town-owned surplus lands as opportunity sites for future housing development. As household size and needs change, reuse of the existing building stock will be an opportunity to create new affordable housing and smaller market-rate rental options.

Recent changes to the state law to include Section 3A MBTA Communities further align with Norfolk’s goals to strategically locate housing-supportive zoning near existing centers. Section 3A requires communities to have at least one zoning district that allows multi-family residential uses (defined as three or more units) by right. Norfolk is classified as a “Commuter Rail” community and is required to have 40% of the 3A-compliant district within a half-mile of the train station. Over the course of 2023, the Norfolk Planning Board has been working with Horsley Witten Group to review the current zoning against Section 3A guidelines and refine the areas for enacting 3A zoning districts. As of August 2023, the Planning Board is advancing work to adopt a 3A zoning overlay district that will apply to properties adjacent to the B-1 Core zoning district and in the Pondville area. The 3A overlay zoning district advances the Housing

### Updated Pondville Boundary



### Updated Norfolk Center Boundary



Source: Horsley Witten Group

Production Plan goals. Norfolk's inclusionary zoning bylaw will apply to the 3A zoning, ensuring that new developments of a certain size will include deed-restricted affordable housing.

Planning for new and diverse housing production must be complemented by other planning efforts to ensure residents' needs are met. In Norfolk, like much of Massachusetts, housing costs have increased tremendously and those most burdened tend to be older adults, veterans, people of color, people with disabilities, and other historically marginalized groups. The HPP Goal 4 notes the importance of reducing housing costs by connecting Norfolk residents with fewer resources to existing state and federal programs that can reduce heating and cooling costs, transportation costs, rent, and general home efficiency measures. These efforts should be coupled with continuing to expand Norfolk's share of subsidized housing to guarantee that households are not paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs. Today, several different Town departments work to connect residents with resources, but feedback received from Master Plan public forums indicates that the information is not shared broadly with the community. Particularly, older residents during the River's Edge workshop in June noted that they do not have consistent lines of communication from the Town and would like to be better informed of services, programs, and events.

Given Norfolk's size as a small town with limited resources, it is critical for the Town to leverage partnerships with neighboring communities, regional and state agencies, and local non-profits that provide community services. HPP Goal 7 emphasizes the need for increasing local capacity to achieve local goals. Beyond hiring dedicated housing staff to advance the housing production plan, Norfolk should pursue opportunities like joining a Regional Housing Shared Services Office. There is an ongoing effort, sponsored by MAPC and Norwood, to explore establishing a Shared Housing Services Office with communities from the South West Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP) and Three Rivers Interlocal Council (TRIC) subregions. As a member of the SWAP,

Norfolk is well-positioned to join this effort. Other communities involved include Bellingham, Hopkinton, Medfield, Milton, Norwood, Randolph, Sharon, and Wrentham. While the services covered by a Shared Housing Services Office can vary, they often include monitoring services to help manage the Subsidized Housing Inventory and similar reporting requirements and support for project-specific consultation needs and program development (e.g., rental assistance programs, down payment assistance programs, buy-down programs, etc.). Services can also include helping connect residents with service providers, which would further HPP Goal 4.

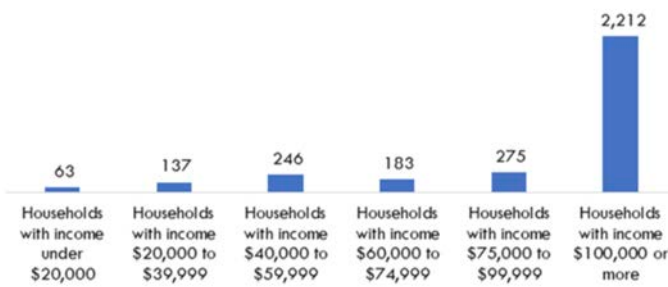
## **Additional Housing Considerations, building on the Housing Production Plan**

### **The influence of housing on community composition**

The previous section notes Norfolk's lack of housing diversity – in both stock and tenure. It is important to connect how housing policy influences overall community makeup and diversity. Norfolk as a community is less diverse – 84% of residents identify as White. Those who identify as people of color are primarily concentrated in Census tracts that include the two prisons. This segregation is not accidental. Housing policies at the federal, state, and local levels have influenced how racially integrated or segregated communities have become over the last century. Non-white households have historically and presently had less access to homeownership, due to racially biased lending practices, racial deed-restrictions that precluded non-White people from certain neighborhoods, and many other examples. When local zoning laws were updated in the mid-20th century to favor single-family development on large lots (an expensive homeownership option) and outlaw multi-unit housing (that provides rental and more affordable ownership options), this further exacerbated racial and socioeconomic segregation and perpetuated inequitable access to high-resourced neighborhoods. Linking housing policy and local zoning to a community's current household composition helps policy makers better

understand the impacts of local land use decisions.

Norfolk Households by Income Level, 2020



## Housing Stability

Feedback gathered from the Master Plan spring public forums and community-wide survey note that housing affordability and high property taxes has made it challenging for current residents to remain stable in their current housing. Strategy 6 of the HPP notes the need for better connecting services available to seniors to help them age in place, such as assistance in making home repairs, cost-savings programs to reduce housing expenses, and grants and emergency assistance programs to prevent foreclosures. Norfolk does offer a tax abatement work program and income-based tax abatement options for senior residents, but the HPP notes that the Town may want to pursue additional programs to help seniors and households with lower or fixed incomes to deal with rising land values and property tax assessments. Norfolk can also help connect residents with programs that help retrofit homes with accessibility improvements. About 5% of Norfolk’s population has a disability, and as residents age, this will likely increase.

## Recent Housing Development in Norfolk

Over the last several years, all of the new residential subdivisions have been created using the 40B comprehensive permit process. This process ensures that 20-25% of the homes will be deed-restricted affordable units, while the remaining 75-80% market-rate units are included in the Subsidized Housing Inventory. Norfolk has been successful in working with developers on “friendly” 40B developments.

## Municipal Strategies to Advance Housing

Norfolk has been proactive in understanding housing needs and challenges and employing a variety of strategies. The level of success in implementation has varied, and the Master Plan offers an opportunity to reflect on what has occurred over the past ten years and where there are opportunities to refine and add new strategies to address housing issues. At one point, Norfolk was a Housing Choice designated community, but this designation was lost in 2018. Despite no longer being designated, the following section demonstrates the local housing tools that Norfolk has adopted to further housing goals.

Norfolk created a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) in 2006 and more recently hired an Affordable Housing Director to strategize how to increase revenue for affordable housing and how to implement programs to combat challenges for housing affordability and stability. The AHT has been successful in operating a scattered site housing program for first-time homebuyers, where existing market-rate homes are purchased and then deed-restricted as affordable homeownership units. Over the last seven years, 18 affordable homes have been created. Interviews with municipal officials conducted as part of the Master Plan process highlighted that while the program has been successful, most recently, homes have been selling for much higher prices, making it difficult for the AHT to continue acquiring homes for this program. The AHT has a cap on how much they can spend to acquire new homes. In 2014, the maximum cost was \$300,000. This was increased to \$450,000, but this is still too low given that the majority of Norfolk’s homes are single-family detached on large lots – and often priced well above \$450,000 in the current market. HPP Strategy 5 notes the importance of this program for providing affordable homeownership options and recommends that the AHT work closely with the town staff to develop an inventory of private properties that have potential for conversion to affordable housing.

The Housing Production Plan includes two strategies directly related to the AHT's ongoing operations and management. HPP Strategy 9 directs the Town to create a regular, predictable funding source for the AHT and a five-year action plan to enhance the Trust's effectiveness. The AHT is primarily funded by the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and funds generated through the inclusionary zoning bylaw. Additional funding sources that could be explored include federal grants, state grants, private donations, cell tower payments, and other municipal funds. Currently, the State Legislature is considering whether to adopt legislation that would enable local option real estate transfer fees<sup>2</sup>. If this state law is passed, the Town of Norfolk could leverage this new tool to increase funds for affordable housing.

To coordinate the Town's housing work, the Town hired an Affordable Housing Director. This municipal position manages the AHT and provides information to the public about affordable housing resources in Norfolk. The director also manages the existing housing stock and works with the AHT to expand affordable housing units. Strategy 8 of the HPP notes that the Town needs to pursue continued funding for this position to ensure local capacity remains in place.

The Affordable Housing Trust is well-positioned to purchase homes from the private market, but they can also work with the Town to develop municipally-owned land into housing. At one point, the AHT did pursue purchasing the old Norfolk Town Hall, which is about 9.5 acres in size. This was unsuccessful, but this represents an opportunity for the AHT and the Town to coordinate redeveloping the site to meet housing and other municipal goals.

The Norfolk Housing Authority manages 84 affordable homes – 64 are reserved for seniors and people with disabilities, while 20 are family-sized and have no restrictions beyond income eligibility.

Norfolk was one of the early adopters of the Community Preservation Act, enacting this in 2001. This program raises funds for municipal housing,

open space/recreation, and historic preservation efforts by adding a small surcharge on local property taxes that is matched with funds from the statewide Community Preservation Trust Fund. Initially, Norfolk levied the full 3% surcharge, but in 2012, Town Meeting voted to decrease the surcharge to 1%. Since its adoption, Norfolk has earned \$11.4 million dollars, of which \$7.1 has come from the local surcharge and \$4.2 million has been matched from the state trust fund. CPA funds have been the primary source of funding for the AHT's efforts to create new affordable housing units. The below chart shows how Norfolk has invested CPA funds in housing projects over the last twenty years.

## Zoning Opportunities and Barriers

Historically, Norfolk has been an agricultural community, where homes were spread out and separated by farms and water features. With the expansion of regional rail and other transportation networks to Norfolk, like Route 115 and 1A, community centers emerged at major crossroads. The majority of Norfolk is zoned primarily for single-family housing (R1, R2, and R3 districts), which has resulted in much of the former farmland and green space not covered under conservation easements to be carved into "estate" lot developments. In more recent years, Norfolk has employed a growth management strategy to direct new housing production to Town Center – where the B-1 zoning permits mixed-use and more residential housing types – and in the southern part of Town near Pondville, Route 115/1A crossroads – where the C-4 mixed-use district and C-6 district allow planned multi-lot residential developments with smaller lot sizes. Most housing types beyond single-family detached either require Special Permit or are outright prohibited. Enactment of the new 3A zoning overlays will create more flexibility within the land use regulations and allow different types of housing to be produced in strategic centers.

Particularly, Norfolk could benefit from allowing more "middle" housing types by right, such as conversion of single-family homes to two-family

homes and accessory dwelling units. Norfolk has adopted open space preservation subdivision regulations to encourage clustered subdivisions where homes are located closer together to preserve open space and natural features. However, open space subdivisions are allowed by Special Permit. To encourage these conservation-oriented subdivisions rather than conventional subdivisions that consume more land under current zoning (due to large minimum lot sizes), the Town could consider incentivizing open space subdivisions by making them allowed by right and offering more flexibility with dimensional regulations or density bonuses.

Norfolk has adopted an inclusionary zoning bylaw that requires between 10 and 20 percent affordable units in developments with six or more units. This bylaw was enacted in 1997 and will be reviewed as part of the Section 3A zoning work, as the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) requires economic feasibility assessments of inclusionary zoning for new 3A zoning districts. Strategy 2 of the HPP notes that the inclusionary zoning bylaw should be reviewed to further incentivize developers to include a greater range of affordable housing units. The inclusionary zoning should also be reviewed against current market conditions and examples from similar communities to ensure the requirements are not restricting or obstructing feasible developments.

Related to zoning is the redevelopment of the former Southwood Hospital site, where MAPC is working with the Town to conduct a reuse and zoning analysis study to inform future development potential. The hospital site is about 88 acres in size and has been vacant since 2003. While there is significant environmental remediation needed before any development can move forward, there is an opportunity for the Town to update zoning in this area to enable a mixed-use housing development that includes a variety of housing types at a variety of price points, including affordable housing. This is supported by Strategy 4 in the HPP.

## **Development Constraints**

Future growth in Norfolk is limited by environmental constraints, infrastructure capacity, and regulatory barriers. As the Open/Environment existing conditions report notes, Norfolk has a long history of flooding due to the various wetlands and other water features. Norfolk has never invested in a comprehensive municipal sewer system and town wells provide limited water capacity. These infrastructure limitations pose the greatest challenge to future housing growth; however, the regulatory framework – where local zoning has historically prohibited smaller housing options on smaller lots and multi-unit structures – makes it challenging to diversify the housing stock. Housing policies should be closely coordinated with Community Facilities and Land Use goals to align the various needs. HPP Strategy 7 charts a path for implementing infrastructure improvements to increase the town's water capacity and expanding wastewater management, which is currently being pursued by the Town. The Town should continue to research non-traditional technologies for waste management systems, particularly for multi-unit and affordable housing developments.

## **Other Considerations**

The Greater Boston area is vulnerable to climate change impacts, including an increased frequency of extreme weather events. Homes located near flood-prone areas should explore potential impacts for future 50 or 100-year storm and flood events.

Explore the impacts of short term rentals, institutional investors, and other dynamics on the affordability of housing.



## Topic Brief

# Open Space and Recreation

### Quick Facts

- Public and private open space in Norfolk makes up approximately 28% of the town's total area.
- Approximately 1,768.4 acres or 17.9% of Norfolk's open space is permanently protected.
- Water resources are a significant aspect of Norfolk's landscape, the Charles River, Stop River, Mill River, Stony Brook, and Cress Brook traverse the town.
- Norfolk is home to Mass Audubon's Stony Brook Wildlife Sanctuary and Bristol Blake State Reservation
- Proposed Metacomet Greenway offers Norfolk an opportunity to be part of a larger regional trail network.
- Community Preservation Act funding has secured and expanded open space and recreation amenities.

### Key Issues

The Open Space and Recreation Plan identified these natural resource challenges:

- Water supply and water quality are two of the most critical challenges for Norfolk.
- The increased likelihood of future drought and strong storms adds to the vulnerability of the town's reliance on rainwater to recharge the aquifer.
- Invasive plants and insects have damaged and, in some cases, replaced, native species.
- Providing sufficient outdoor and indoor recreation facilities for current and future use.
- Providing recreational and social activities for all ages, but youth in particular.
- Increasing public access to existing protected open space and improving ADA accessibility.
- Public feedback as part of the Master Plan Phase I engagement highlighted that residents are overall very happy with the recreation offerings in Norfolk, but there are opportunities to diversify the facilities to better serve all segments of the population.

# Open Space and Recreation

## Introduction

Norfolk's most recent Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was completed in 2017. The plan was approved by the State, making the Town eligible for applicable state grant programs. The OSRP provides a comprehensive overview of the Town's natural history, a detailed inventory of all open space and recreational resources in Norfolk, and recommendations for protecting and improving these resources. A Seven-Year Action Plan provides detailed steps for achieving the plan's goals and objectives, timeframe for achieving the action, and potential funding sources.

The 2017 OSRP identified the following five (5) goals for Norfolk:

- Identify, preserve and protect the historic, cultural and natural resources that contribute to the character of the Town.
- Protect and enhance the quality of Norfolk's surface and groundwater as sources of municipal and private drinking water and for wildlife and recreation use.
- Increase environmental awareness among all sectors of the community
- Enhance public access to and use of existing conservation lands where appropriate, and establish continuous greenbelts, especially along waterways.
- Improve and increase recreational opportunities in Norfolk.

## Recent Open Space and Recreation Accomplishments

Through the efforts of the Town of Norfolk, the Community Preservation Committee, and other committees and interest groups, a number of new

open space acquisitions and improvements have been made in recent years.

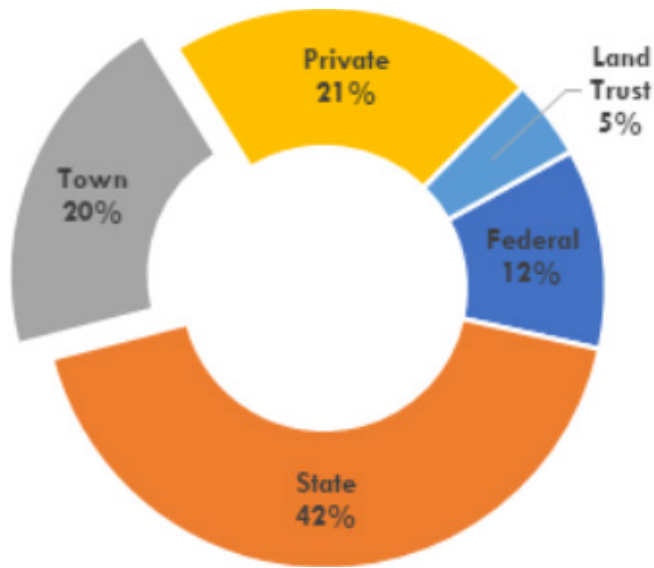
- Norfolk Town Ponds Survey & Map Vegetation: Allocated \$5,000 in CPA funds to survey and map vegetation of five town-owned ponds and lakes.
- Mirror Lake Weed Control Project: Allocated \$20,000 in CPA funds for a five-year weed control program to restore 10 acres of Mirror Lake.
- Purchase of Department of Corrections Land: Allocated \$121,200 in CPA funds for the purchase of land from the state located at the Department of Corrections Prison.
- Feasibility Study Metacomet Greenway: Allocated \$50,000 in CPA funds to conduct a feasibility study for the proposed Metacomet Greenway to be located on the former Penn Central Transportation rail bed.
- Highland Lake City Mills Weed Control Project: Allocated \$40,000 in CPA funds for a three to five-year weed control project at Highland Lake and City Mills

## Existing Conditions/Facilities Existing Park and Open Space System

Norfolk's open space system encompasses over 2,000 acres of public and privately owned land and includes parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, school grounds and recreational facilities, community gardens, conservation land, cemeteries, and memorials. These resources not only promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles but also contribute to the town's unique character and enhance quality of life for residents.

In Norfolk, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns approximately 868 acres of open space, making it the largest holder of public land in the Town. Roughly 20%, or 374 acres, of the Town's open space, is municipally owned and managed

by the Recreation Department, the Department of Public Works (DPW), or the Conservation Commission. Other owners of open space land in Norfolk include Federal agencies, non-profit organizations, private entities, and institutions.



**Figure 1: Open Space Ownership**

Open Space Type	Acres
Recreation Department	45.5
Norfolk Conservation Commission	304.77
Norfolk Water Department	155.38
Other Municipal Land	346.95
State Land	18.3
Federal Land	311.07
Non-Profit Open Space	281.81
Conservation Restrictions (Permanent)	57.72
Conservation Restrictions (Temporary)	32.42
Chapter 61, 61A, 61B	1,186.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,740.66</b>

## Protected Open Space

Whether publicly or privately owned, there are various tools and methods that can be used to protect parks and open space. These tools differ in the level of protection they offer and can impose temporary or permanent (“in perpetuity”) restrictions on the use and development of land. The different methods of protecting open space in Norfolk include Article 97, Chapter 61, environmental regulations, and conservation

restrictions.

## Levels and Types of Open Space Protection

**In Perpetuity:** Legally protected in perpetuity and recorded as such in a deed or other official document. Land is considered protected in perpetuity if it is owned by the town’s Conservation Commission or the Water Department; if the Town has a conservation restriction on the property in perpetuity; if it is owned by one of the State’s conservation agencies (thereby covered by article 97); if it is owned by a non-profit land trust; or if the Town received federal or state assistance for the purchase or improvement of the property. Public lands used for conservation or recreation purposes may be protected under Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution (see the section on Article 97 for more details). Private land is considered protected in perpetuity if it has a deed restriction in the form of an Agriculture Preservation Restriction (APR) or a Conservation Restriction (CRs). More than 80% of all open space in the Town of Norfolk, or 1,767 acres, is protected in perpetuity.

**Temporary:** Legally protected for less than perpetuity (e.g. short term conservation restriction), or temporarily protected through an existing functional use. These lands could be developed for other uses at the end of their temporary protection or when their functional use is no longer necessary. These lands will revert to unprotected status at a given date unless protection status is extended. In Norfolk, this includes approximately 62.4 acres of land owned by the US Army Corps of Engineers that is used for flood control.

**Limited:** Protected by legal mechanisms other than those above, or protected through functional or traditional use. These lands might be protected by a requirement of a majority municipal vote for any change in status. This also includes lands that are likely to remain open space for other reasons (e.g., cemeteries). Only 39 acres, or 2% of the Town’s open space, has limited protection. This includes the Seekonk Street Cemetery, Town Hill, and Freeman-Kennedy School Athletic Fields.



**None/No Protection:** Totally unprotected by any legal or functional means. This land is usually privately owned and could be sold without restriction at any time for another use (e.g., private golf course and private woodland).

### **Article 97**

Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution protects all publicly owned land used for conservation or recreation purposes. Article 97 stipulates that any sale, transfer, or change in use of Article 97 land needs approval from the Conservation Commission, a 2/3 vote of Town Meeting, and a 2/3 vote of the State House of Representatives and Senate. While such actions may occur on occasion, it is rare. Therefore, land protected under Article 97 is typically deemed to be protected in perpetuity.

### **Conservation Restrictions**

A conservation restriction limits future development on a property by transferring some rights, such as the right to construct new buildings, from the landowner to a nonprofit organization or governmental entity for conservation purposes. Organizations that hold conservation restrictions, easements, or other deed instruments in Norfolk include the Massachusetts Audubon Society and New England Forestry Foundation.

### **Massachusetts Chapter 61**

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B tax programs provide a financial incentive for private landowners to manage their properties for forestry (Ch 61), agricultural (Ch 61A), and recreation (Ch 61B) purposes. In exchange, the owner gives the community (or a designated nonprofit or public agency) a “right of first refusal” if the landowner chooses to sell the land in the future. This is a voluntary program, and the restriction is lifted if the landowner chooses to withdraw from the program and pay retroactive taxes. The Town of Norfolk currently has approximately 1,187 acres of land enrolled in Chapter 61, including 243 acres of forestry land (Ch 61), 730 acres of agricultural land (Ch 61A), and 214 acres of recreational land (Ch 61B).

## **Recreational Amenities**

When it comes to parks and recreation facilities, they are typically divided into two main categories based on the types of activities and amenities they offer. Active recreation facilities encourage physical activity such as sports, hiking, or biking. Passive recreation facilities are designed for more relaxed activities like picnicking, bird watching, or simply enjoying the natural surroundings. The Town of Norfolk has a diverse range of parks and open spaces that offer residents and visitors opportunities for both active and passive recreation. Not only do these public spaces promote healthy and active lifestyles, but they also foster a sense of community among residents.

### **Active Recreation**

The Recreation Department manages and oversees scheduling for Norfolk’s three primary active recreation sites: the Pond Street Recreation Complex, the Community Park at Rockwood Road, and the Freeman-Kennedy School. The Department also provides a range of organized sports and athletic programming in the Town’s parks and open spaces. These recreational sites offer an array of activities for both residents and visitors, such as baseball, soccer, volleyball, tennis, and skateboarding.

#### **Pond Street Recreation Complex**

Pond Street Recreation Complex is a 20.8-acre site located at 33 Pond Street and is the Town’s largest recreation site. Facilities and amenities at this site include six playing fields, volleyball, tennis, and basketball courts, a skate park, a tot lot, a sheltered picnic area, portable restrooms, and a ¾ mile walking trail.

#### **Norfolk Community Park at Rockwood Road**

The Norfolk Community Park at Rockwood Road is a 17-acre site located at 49 Rockwood Road. Facilities and amenities at this site include a tot lot playground, conservation trails, a community garden, and portable toilet facilities. The Norfolk Community Garden is a joint project between the

Norfolk Lions, the town of Norfolk, and the Norfolk Grange. The garden consists of 30 planting beds of various sizes, including three accessible raised beds. All beds are filled with a 50/50 mixture of loam and compost provided by the town's Department of Public Works.

### **Freeman Kennedy School**

The Freeman Kennedy School is an 8-acre site located at 70 Boardman Street. The site provides several spaces for both active and passive recreation. Facilities and amenities at this site include playgrounds designed to serve different age groups, a basketball court, a softball field, a little league field, a soccer field, and a football field. This site also features a large rain garden planted with native and ecologically sustainable plants.

### **Olive Day School**

The H. Olive Day School is located on a 24-acre site at 232 Main Street. The site features various recreational amenities, including a playground, an athletic field, a walking path, and a gymnasium. These facilities are primarily designed to cater to the school's student population.

### **Passive Recreation**

Residents in Norfolk have access to several passive recreation sites where they can spend time with their family and friends or have a peaceful moment alone to enjoy nature. The Town's many streams, brooks, ponds, and wetlands provide opportunities for water-based activities like canoeing and fishing, which are particularly popular along the Charles River. In addition, sites such as Stony Brook and the Bristol Blake Reservation offer access to hiking trails and a chance to study wildlife.

### **Stony Brook Nature Center and Wildlife Sanctuary**

The Stony Brook Nature Center and Wildlife Sanctuary is known for its 525 ft. boardwalk, which winds through forests, fields, and wetlands and provides visitors with up-close views of wildlife. The site also features natural history exhibits, a gift shop, a picnic area, and a butterfly

garden. The 107-acre sanctuary is owned by the Massachusetts Audubon Society and is adjacent to the 140-acre Bristol Blake State Reservation. These two sites are cooperatively managed by Mass Audubon and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

### **Town Hill**

Town Hill is a 1.6-acre common located next to the Norfolk Public Library. This passive site is known as the site of Norfolk's first Town Hall and features lawn areas, a walking path, a gazebo, and benches.

### **Conservation Land**

In addition to the active and passive recreation sites, Norfolk's open space system includes several conservation areas that are managed by the Conservation Commission. These areas are usually undeveloped tracts of land that are managed with an emphasis on their aesthetic and natural resource values. Although some of these sites may provide opportunities for passive recreation, their primary purpose and use is environmental protection. These sites are shown in the table on the following page.

### **City Mills Pond**

City Mills Pond is a 15-acre site situated at the intersection of Main Street and Mill River. The pond was created by the damming of Mill River for water-powered manufacturing mills. The site is managed by the Conservation Commission and features a small picnic area furnished with tables, informational signage about the site's history, and trash cans.

### **Natural Resources**

The Town of Norfolk is rich in natural resources. These valuable environmental assets include parks, open spaces, rivers, streams, wetlands, wildlife habitat, tree canopy, and agricultural land.

### **Agricultural Land**

The history, identity, and economy of Norfolk have all been greatly shaped by agriculture. The town's open rolling landscape, rich soils, and proximity

**Figure 4: Norfolk Conservation Land:**

Site	Location	Acres
Lind Farm Conservation Area	Marshall Street	64
<u>Pondville</u> Conservation Land	78 Pond Street	26
Campbell Forest	49 North Street/Alice Avenue	42
Kenneth Wood Conservation Land (Town Pond)	Main Street	7
Bird Farm Conservation Land	off Main Street	25
Grove Street Conservation Land	Between Grove Street and MBTA Tracks	22
Maple Street Conservation Land	off Maple Street	36
Toils End Farm (Open Space)	off Maple Street	38
Old Mill Meadow Conservation Land	off Old Mill Road Extension	5
River Road Fishing & Boat Launch	River Road	7
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>272</b>

to water resources made it an ideal location for farming.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), approximately 45% of Norfolk’s land area is considered “prime farmland”. Prime farmland, as defined by the USDA, is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses.

Although today, only a small amount of vegetable and animal farms remain in Norfolk, these scenic landscapes still play a significant role in maintaining the town’s rural character. Approximately 730 acres of agricultural land in Norfolk is protected under Chapter 61A. The Ch. 61A program requires a minimum of 5 contiguous acres actively devoted” to agricultural or horticultural use including fruits, vegetables, ornamental shrubs, timber, animals, and maple syrup. In addition to meeting the minimum acreage requirement, the landowner must demonstrate at least \$500 in annual sales of agricultural products.

### Forest Land

Approximately 97% of Norfolk’s land area is considered prime forest land. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines “prime forest” as any land that has soil capable of growing wood at a rate of eighty-five cubic feet or more per acre per year. There are approximately 243 acres of forestland in Norfolk enrolled in Chapter 61. The Ch. 61 program requires a minimum of 10 contiguous acres in active forest management. In addition, the minimum acreage requirement, land enrolled in the Ch. 61 program must be managed under a 10-year forest management plan approved by a state service forester. When a landowner enrolls in the Ch. 61 program, a lien is attached to the landowner’s property to ensure that undeveloped land will continue to provide public benefits. This lien stays with the property when sold or transferred to another landowner. No penalties apply as long as the land remains enrolled or eligible for enrollment in one of the three Ch. 61 programs.

## **Water Resources Watersheds**

Norfolk is situated within the Charles River Watershed, which covers 308 square miles and starts from Echo Lake in Hopkinton and extends all the way to Boston Harbor. It is one of 28 distinct watersheds in the state and spans across 35 municipalities in the Boston metropolitan area. It is also home to approximately one million people, making it one of the most densely populated watersheds in New England. The Charles River Watershed has faced significant pollution problems in the past. Thankfully, environmental organizations like the Charles River Watershed Association (CRWR) have made great strides in improving water quality through advocacy, education, and cleanup efforts.

### **Watershed Protection District**

The Watershed Protection District is an overlay district established by the Town in 1992 to protect Norfolk's water resources, including water bodies, wetlands, recharge areas, and the water table, from harmful uses and land development. The district includes all rivers, ponds, lakes, and other water bodies in Norfolk and their surrounding land up to twenty-five feet from the mean high-water line and/or from adjacent low areas of any brooks, streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, marshes, swamps, and bogs.

This regulation applies to all land uses within the overlay district; however, passive recreational uses and the construction of boat docks, landings, and other recreational resources are allowed. The bylaw specifies both prohibited uses, such as the storage of hazardous materials like salt and petroleum, and uses allowed by special permits, such as fertilizer application for non-domestic or non-agricultural purposes. The expansion of existing dwellings is permitted by special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals provided that ground coverage is not increased by more than 25% of the original structure coverage. Residential construction is allowed by special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals after a Determination of Non-Applicability by the Norfolk Conservation

Commission, a review by other boards, and a public hearing.

### **Surface Water**

The water bodies and wetlands in Norfolk are important features of the landscape. They provide opportunities for various recreational activities and amenities such as swimming, fishing, wildlife sanctuaries, canoeing, and parklands. Several rivers and streams meander across Town and flow into the Charles River, including Mill River, Stop River, Stony Brook, and Cress Brook.

The Charles River acts as a boundary between the towns of Norfolk and Millis, as well as Norfolk and Medfield. It offers recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, including boating and fishing. Additionally, part of the river falls under the protection of Area G within the Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area.

Cress Brook is located in the northwest corner of Norfolk. The Brook runs west from the privately-owned Cress Brook Pond into the Mill River. The Mill River originates in Wrentham and flows along the western boundary of Norfolk. It then passes through City Mills Pond, Cress/Millers Brook, and Comey's Pond before joining the Charles River. Some sections of the Mill River close to Franklin are protected as a part of Area L of the Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area. Stony Brook connects Stony Brook Pond to the Stop River, running along the eastern boundary of Norfolk. A portion of Stony Brook is protected by the Bristol Blake Reservation and Stony Brook Wildlife Sanctuary.

The Stop River flows in a nearly parallel direction to the Mill River on the eastern side of Norfolk. It serves as a crucial passage for wildlife in the area. Like the Mill River, the Stop River also originates from Wrentham, then flows through various ponds and tributaries before entering Medfield, where it eventually joins the Charles River. The Stop River is also included in Area G of the Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area and contributes to significant wetlands in the town.

## Impaired Water Bodies

The Massachusetts Department of Energy's 2016 Integrated List of Waters identifies several bodies of water in or near Norfolk that are classified as Category 5. This classification means that these bodies of water are impaired due to one or more pollutants and require a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) plan for restoration. TMDL is a regulatory term under the U.S. Clean Water Act that sets the maximum amount of pollutant that a body of water can receive while still maintaining water quality standards. The following are all Category 5 waters:

- Charles River – Beginning at Box Pond in Bellingham for 11.5 miles to Populatic Pond in Norfolk/Medway, the impairment is caused by chlorodane, DDT, and mercury in fish tissue, as well as E. Coli. Beginning at Populatic Pond in Norfolk/Medway for 18.1 miles to Natick, the impairment is caused by algae, benthic macroinvertebrates, chlorodane, DDT, and mercury in fish tissue, phosphorus, dissolved oxygen supersaturation, and nutrient/ eutrophication biological indicators.
- Mill River – the length of the river is impaired by temperature
- Populatic Pond – impairment is caused by chlordanes, DDT, excessive algae growth, dissolved oxygen saturation, nutrient/ eutrophication biological indicators, mercury in fish tissue,
- Stop River – is broken into two sections: from Wrentham to Norfolk-Walpole MCI discharge/Highland Lake area, the river is impaired by ambient bioassays – chronic aquatic toxicity, oxygen, dissolved oxygen and phosphorus; from the Norfolk Walpole MCI discharge to the Charles River, it is impaired by sewage, phosphorus, and temperature.

## Aquifer Recharge Areas

Norfolk shares major aquifers with Franklin, Medway, Millis, and Wrentham. The Norfolk Water Department's two well sites, Gold Street well site and Spruce Road well site, are located within two separate water supply protection areas, with portions of Zone II #118 extending into the town of Wrentham. Each well has a Zone I radius of 400 feet. The wells are located in aquifers with a high vulnerability to contamination due to the absence of hydrogeologic barriers (i.e. clay) that can prevent contaminant migration. The main threat to the aquifer is depletion. Regional drought or climate-driven precipitation pattern changes can influence the amount of recharge to the groundwater supply. The Charles River Watershed serves as a groundwater source for many of the surrounding communities, and drought conditions may exacerbate the already-stressed aquifer. However, the Division strictly adheres to the aquifer maximum use permits with MassDEP to protect the groundwater source.

The Aquifer and Water Supply and Interim Wellhead Protection District protects, preserves, and maintains Norfolk's aquifers and recharge areas from temporary and permanent contamination, as well as to comply with federal and state laws, including the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments, and the Massachusetts Source Approval Regulations. This is also an overlay district which includes two zones – a Certain Groundwater Zone and a Surface Water Protection Zone. Inclusion in this district and its specific zones is determined by standard geological and hydrogeological investigations and are modified as needed. Within this district, general residential and recreational uses are allowed, but uses which could expose the area to contamination, such as the storage of chemicals, landfills, and industrial or commercial activities with wastewater discharges, are prohibited.

## Flood Hazard Areas

Norfolk has multiple areas located within FEMA flood zones. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) FIRM Database data published as of July 17, 2012 the flood hazard areas present in Norfolk are as follows:

- A: 1% Annual Chance of Flooding, no Base Flood Elevation
- AE: 1% Annual Chance of Flooding, with Base Flood Elevation
- AE: Regulatory Floodway
- X: 0.2% Annual Chance of Flooding
- Zone A areas in Natick are located around
- Lake Cochituate, Fisk, and Dug Ponds.

Zone AE is an area inundated by 100-year flooding for which base flood elevations (BFE) have been determined. These areas in Norfolk primarily surround the town's major waterways. They include the Charles River, Mill River, Stop River, Cress Brook, and Stony Brook, as well as their surrounding wetlands. Zone X includes the areas between the limits of the base flood and the 0.2-percent-annual-chance (or 500-year) flood. In Norfolk this includes areas surrounding Kingsbury Pond, Pickerel Pond, Stony Brook Pond, and the Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area.

## Wetlands

Norfolk has several areas of forested and non-forested wetlands scattered throughout the town, with higher concentrations along major waterways and surface water resources. Approximately 1,239 acres (12.5% of Norfolk's land area) have been identified as wetlands. These areas include portions of the Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area (NVSA) that surround the Stop River in the northeast and southeast sections of town, as well as the Mill River in northwest Norfolk. The NVSA protects and preserves wetland and floodplain areas in the watershed and provides natural flood control, habitat for fish and wildlife,

and recreational opportunities for Norfolk and neighboring communities.

These areas are protected under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act Wetlands Protection Act and River Protection Acts (MGL Chapter 131 Section 40) which states that no one may "remove, fill, dredge, or alter" any wetland, floodplain, bank, land under a water body, land within 100 feet of a wetland, or land within 200 feet of a perennial stream or river, without a permit from the local Conservation Commission.

In addition to state legislation and regulations that protect wetland resources, the town's Wetlands Protection Bylaw, adopted in 1989 and last updated in 2022, provides additional protections for Norfolk's wetlands, related water resources, and adjoining land areas through a review process overseen by the Norfolk Conservation Commission.

The Conservation Commission is responsible for administering and enforcing the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and River Protection Act. The Commission has the authority to reject projects that could potentially harm important resource area values, including but not limited to the following: public or private water supply, groundwater, flood control, erosion and sedimentation control, storm damage prevention, water pollution prevention, fisheries, wildlife habitat, recreation, aesthetics, agriculture, and aquaculture values. In addition, Norfolk's local Conservation Commission regulations provide protection for vernal pools, which are not provided in the State law (See discussion of vernal pools in the Fisheries and Wildlife section of this chapter).

In 2007, the Town adopted a Stormwater Management Bylaw to help control erosion and to prevent contaminants from entering its stormwater system. The regulations require a permit for land disturbances equal to or greater than one acre and prohibit illicit discharges into the stormwater system. The bylaw was amended in 2021 and the Town implemented new policies based on the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) Permit. The updated regulations now require Low

Impact Development site strategies and more rigorous pollution and runoff controls for new developments and redevelopments that increase impervious surfaces.

## **Flora and Fauna Resources**

### **Vegetation**

The vegetation found in Norfolk is typical of the eastern Massachusetts region. The Town's vegetation consists primarily of deciduous forests, with limited crop land and a variety of wetlands interspersed throughout the town. Upland forests are mainly dominated by red oak, shagbark hickory, and white pine, which are prevalent in land cleared since the 19th century. Forested low-lying wetlands, on the other hand, are mostly red maple trees located near streams of water and include speckled alder, highbush blueberry, sweet pepperbush underbrush, and elm, poplar, and willow trees. Similarly, the Scrub-shrub Wetlands have trees that grow in saturated or standing water, which are usually willow, buttonbush, meadow sweet, hardhack, and red osier dogwood. Emergent wetlands in Norfolk are home to semi-woody plants that grow in water up to eighteen inches deep, including cattail, purple loosestrife, reed blue-joint, and sedge. Aquatic vegetation, which either floats or has roots on the bottom, contains white water lily, bladderwort, and duckweed.

Public shade trees are managed by the town's Tree Warden and the Department of Public Works (DPW). In accordance with MGL Ch. 87 and MGL Ch. 40, Sec. 15C the Town enforces the Shade Trees Act and Scenic Roads Act to help protect existing public shade trees. The Shade Tree Act gives the Tree Warden jurisdiction over the planting or removal of any public shade trees in a public right of way. The Town's subdivision regulations also require the addition of public shade trees within a 7-foot strip between the edge of pavement and sidewalk along new roads.

## **Corridors for Wildlife Migration**

A wildlife corridor is a linkage or pathway connecting two or more habitats across the landscape that have been disrupted by human activities or development. These corridors play a crucial role in maintaining ecological processes, serving as safe pathways for migratory animals to move between similar habitats and access resources like food and water. Additionally, wildlife corridors can contribute to the resilience of the landscape amidst changing climates and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by preserving carbon in native vegetation.

Biomap is an online mapping tool and resource developed by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP). Its purpose is to help communities in the Commonwealth gain a better understanding of biodiversity distribution and threats. The tool also provides guidance for strategic protection and stewardship of lands and waters that are essential for conserving biological diversity.

The BioMap has two primary components: Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape. Core Habitat identifies areas that are critical for the long-term persistence of rare species, exemplary natural communities, and resilient ecosystems. The Critical Natural Landscape component identifies large landscape blocks that are minimally impacted by development, as well as buffers to core habitats and coastal areas, both of which enhance connectivity and resilience (see Map XX).

The Charles River watershed is a great example of a core aquatic wildlife corridor. The NHESP identified the Charles River, Mill River, and Stop River corridors and their adjacent wetlands as significant Core Habitat areas (see Map XX). This highlights the importance of safeguarding the Town's aquifers against stormwater pollution and conserving the land surrounding waterways to preserve the health of ecosystems. Other Core Habitat areas in the town include the Pondville and Grove Street Conservation Lands.

## Unique Environments & Rare Species

An Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is a place in Massachusetts that receives special recognition because of the quality, uniqueness, and significance of its natural and cultural resources. Norfolk does not have any designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, but the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has identified eight (8) rare plant and animal species in the town.

Some of these species are considered historic because they have not been observed since the nineteenth century. However, species such as the Wood Turtle and the Eastern Box Turtle have been spotted in Norfolk as recently as 2022 and 2019, respectively.

Based on the NHESP database, there are three vascular plants that have been identified as Endangered: Sweet Coltsfoot (1897), Few-seeded

Sedge (1905), and Andrews' Bottle Gentian (1910). Two species, Grass-leaved Ladies'-tresses (1907) and the Marbled Salamander (2017), are classified as Threatened. The other rare species, which include Bridle Shiner (1995), Eastern Box Turtle (2019), and Wood Turtle (2022), are classified as species of Special Concern. In addition, the town is home to one of 29 breeding sites in Massachusetts for the Great Blue Heron. This species was recently removed from the Rare Animal list, thanks to vital natural habitat sites like the ones found in Norfolk.

## Scenic, Cultural & Historic Landscapes

Norfolk boasts several picturesque landscapes with their own unique environments. These areas provide stunning views of the surrounding rivers, woods, and wetlands as well as the surviving farmland in the region. Some of the notable scenic areas are:

### NHESP Rare Species Viewer

Common Name	Scientific Name	Taxonomic Group	MES A Status	Most Recent Obs.
Andrews' Bottle Gentian	<i>Gentiana andrewsii</i>	Vascular Plant	E	1910
Bridle Shiner	<i>Notropis bifrenatus</i>	Fish	SC	1995
Eastern Box Turtle	<i>Terrapene carolina</i>	Reptile	SC	2019
Few-seeded Sedge	<i>Carex oligosperma</i>	Vascular Plant	E	1905
Grass-leaved Ladies'-tresses	<i>Spiranthes vernalis</i>	Vascular Plant	T	1907
Marbled Salamander	<i>Ambystoma opacum</i>	Amphibian	T	2017
Sweet Coltsfoot	<i>Petasites frigidus</i> var. <i>palmatus</i>	Vascular Plant	E	1897
Wood Turtle	<i>Glyptemys insculpta</i>	Reptile	SC	2022

(E) = Endangered (T) = Threatened (SC) = Special Concern



- Bristol-Blake State Reservation - A state-owned nature reserve and park space which, together with the adjacent wildlife sanctuary, preserves a large area at the center of Norfolk including Stony Brook Pond, wetlands, core habitats and a critical natural landscape.
- Campbell Town Forest - Known as the Norfolk Town Forest, the woodland area is located near the center of town and includes walking trails that are open to the public.
- Charles River - Important for both its recreational uses and its contributions to the scenic landscape, the Charles River flows across the northwest corner of Norfolk and is accessible for fishing, canoeing and boating, and viewing from Town-owned conservation land.
- City Mills Pond - A nine-acre pond located near the western border of Norfolk near Franklin, the pond is owned by the Conservation Commission and is available for passive recreation including boating and fishing.
- Clark & West Streets - A unique and scenic viewing location where an antediluvian oak tree is situated amongst wetlands and the Stop River. This scenic landscape is across from Norfolk-Walpole MCI.
- Cranberry Bog - Located on the southern border of Norfolk near Park Street and the Foley Dairy Farm, the site has reduced production in recent years but continues operations within the community.
- Holmes Family Farm - Farmland located between Main and Myrtle Streets which has been owned and farmed by the Holmes family for generations.
- Jane and Paul Newton's Farm - Located in north Norfolk at the corner of Cleveland and Fruit Streets, the farm grows vegetables and raises a few sheep in addition to running a small fruit and vegetable stand during the summer and a strawberry picking facility.
- Kunde Conservation Land - This twenty-acre conservation area was donated in memory of Mrs. Ida Kunde in the 1990s. Located behind the H. Olive Day Elementary School, the property includes woods, vernal pools, and easily accessible walking trails.
- Mass Audubon's Stony Brook Wildlife Sanctuary - Mass Audubon oversees half of a large natural area considered to be both a critical natural landscape and a core habitat for endangered species which includes walking trails and a nature center.
- Game Club - Although both are private clubs, the sites include three trout ponds surrounded by woodland and provide visibility to the Charles River.
- Populatic Pond - This Great Pond is a scenic landscape and includes a public boat ramp which provides both physical and visual access to the pond and the adjacent Charles River.
- Town Hill - Although newer in its development and character than the other sites on the list, Town Hill is a locally developed scenic landscape at the heart of Norfolk.

## **Geology, Topography, & Soils**

The bedrock composition and surficial geology of Norfolk determine the soil make up, topography, and the Town's landscape character. Norfolk's geology is the result of glacial activity in the area approximately 20,000 years ago and consists of an uneven mass of bedrock covered with till or outwash material. Glacial stratified deposits of course material cover the vast majority of the town, with the exception of areas adjacent to the town's water resources and higher elevations. Areas with more significant elevation changes (ten feet or more) are more typically found to be bedrock outcroppings covered in thin till, with a few limited areas of thick till bedrock generally located within larger areas of thin till bedrock. In

Norfolk, bedrock is most often found less than fifty feet from the surface, and outcrops are common features of the landscape.

Norfolk geology is a mix of post-glacial low hills and open valleys, with elevations ranging from 120 to 300 feet above sea level. The presence of the Charles River along the northern border of the town provides surface draining via smaller tributaries. In the areas directly adjacent to the town's rivers, ponds, and streams, the geology is more typically found to be made up of postglacial deposits. These later deposits are often swamp deposits with a few areas of floodplain alluvium at the intersection of Mill River and the Charles River, and to the north of Bush Pond.

Norfolk's soil is mostly composed of Hinckley-Windsor-Sudbury Association soil, which makes up 57% of the town's soil composition. This soil consists of a mix of sand and gravel and is ideal for residential, commercial, and industrial development. It is especially good for developing new sources of groundwater as well as mining sand and gravel.

Approximately 20% of the town is comprised of Gloucester-Charlton-Acton soil, which is a moderately to well-draining stony soil that is well suited for agriculture, recreation, and woodland. These characteristics, however, mean that these soils are poorly suited for sewage disposal. Seventeen percent of Norfolk is composed of Muck-Whitman-Ridgebury-Scarboro soils, which are typically found along waterways and floodplains. These soils are great for wildlife and woodland, but they have poor draining capacity, which can be a challenge for residential, commercial, and industrial development due to their water saturation levels.

Norfolk also has small pockets of Scituate-Paxton-Essex soils, approximately 4%, and Hollis-Shapleigh, approximately 3%. Scituate-Paxton-Essex soils are stony and drain moderately well, making them ideal for agriculture and woodland uses. However, the high-water permeability of these soils makes them poorly suited for

any development that requires on-site sewage disposal. Similarly, Hollis-Shapleigh soils have limited development potential due to the presence of shallow bedrock. These soils are best suited to wildlife and woodland uses.

## **Management and Administration**

The Town of Norfolk has multiple departments, committees, and volunteer groups that oversee the management and preservation of its open spaces. Below is a summary of some of these groups and their services.

### **Conservation Commission**

The Norfolk Conservation Commission is a seven-member regulatory body that is responsible for protecting and preserving the Town's natural resources. Their mission is to protect Norfolk's resource areas in accordance with the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (WPA) and the local Wetland Regulations as specified in the Town of Norfolk bylaws. The Commission also pursues acquisition of open space for the protection of wetlands, groundwater resources, and wildlife habitat.

### **Recreation Department**

The Norfolk Recreation Department is located on the ground floor of Town Hall. The Recreation Department is responsible for managing and implementing recreational programs and community events. Additionally, the department is responsible for the maintenance of Norfolk's parks, playgrounds, and athletic fields, and oversees capital projects at these facilities. The department consists of a full-time director, a program coordinator, and an administrative assistant. In addition to office staff, there are over seventy program instructors, seasonal employees, and contractors.

Norfolk Recreation offers self-supporting, fee-based programs for people of all ages throughout the year. Programs offered include music and activities for babies and toddlers, STEM programs for school-age children, youth sports leagues and clinics, and adult sports and enrichment programs. The revenue generated from the fee-based

programs supports most of the free community events organized by the department, like the summer concert series, holiday lighting, Community Day participation, the Easter Egg Hunt, and the End-of-the- Summer Blast.

### **Recreation Commission**

The Recreation Commission consists of five elected commissioners whose goal is to develop a long-term vision and path to meet the recreational needs of Norfolk residents. The Commission works in collaboration with the Recreation Department and the Department of Public Works to develop, acquire, and maintain the town’s recreational assets.

### **Department of Public Works (DPW) Highway and Grounds Division**

The Department of Public Works’ Grounds Division is in charge of rehabilitating, constructing, and maintaining 52 acres of recreational land owned by the town. This includes athletic fields, parks, cemeteries, memorials, municipal green spaces, and school grounds. The division also handles tree and brush trimming and tree removal in collaboration with the Town’s Tree Warden. Additionally, the Grounds Division oversees the installation of holiday decorations in the town center, including lights, flags, and wreaths.

### **Cemetery Division**

The DPW’s Cemetery Division has the duty of preserving the two town-owned cemeteries in Norfolk. These are the Pondville Cemetery at 70 Everett Street and the Norfolk Cemetery at 24 Seekonk Street.

### **Other Considerations**

The Greater Boston area is vulnerable to climate change impacts, including an increased frequency of extreme weather events. Understanding the natural resources and maximizing open spaces can help Norfolk continue to prepare and be more resilient as climate change occurs.



## Topic Brief

# Transportation

### Quick Facts

- Over 90% of Norfolk households have at least one vehicle; however, there are between 50 to 100 zero vehicle households.
- Approximately 69% of Norfolk residents drive to work, with 8% taking transit and 21% working from home. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 80% of residents drove, 10% used transit, and 8% worked from home.
- Despite the increase in residents working from home, Norfolk has seen a 19% increase in vehicle miles traveled, likely due to more people driving locally for daily needs and rebounding numbers of residents driving to work. The Town has also experienced a moderate increase in vehicular crashes.
- Fewer than a third of the Town's streets have sidewalks, and many are unlinked and do not always connect to Town schools, parks, or other destinations.

### Key Issues

- The lack of pedestrian and bicycle connections means the vast majority of trips, even short trips, must be made by automobile – resulting in increasing traffic, pollution, and creating difficulty for those who cannot drive or afford a personal vehicle (including children and teens, people with lower incomes, seniors). The requirement that most trips occur by driving also has a public health impact by reducing the opportunity for including active travel and healthy lifestyle into daily life.
- The Town adopted a Complete Streets policy and prioritization plan in 2019, but the lack of new sidewalk and bicycle connections since the 2007 Master Plan suggests challenges in implementing recommendations.
- Despite the participation of some Town schools in MassDOT's Safe Routes to Schools program, many students cannot safely walk or bike to school, and many have difficulty with participating in after-school activities if they do not have friends or family who can drive them.
- There has been an increase in the number of crashes over the last few years; but few fatalities, and few pedestrian and bicycle crashes.
- With fewer people commuting to Boston, there may be an opportunity to re-consider land dedicated to commuter rail parking within downtown Norfolk.
- GATRA Go United on-demand transit can connect people to destinations in Norfolk and surrounding towns, but many residents may not be aware of the service, and feedback from residents indicates that services may not be meeting community needs.

# Transportation

## Introduction

Norfolk's transportation network consists of 85 miles of streets, with most having no sidewalks, and no bike lanes or improved (accessible) trails. This auto-oriented network with lack of connectivity for walkers or bikers can create challenges, including greater vehicular traffic congestion at commercial areas, schools, and downtown. Vehicle miles traveled and crashes have both increased in the last few years, even with the reduced commuting during the COVID-19 pandemic. The town is served by the MBTA commuter rail (Franklin/Foxboro line) and GATRA, but these services have some limitations. Most residents who work commute by car to places outside of Norfolk, with Boston being the most popular work location.

The Complete Streets Prioritization Plan completed in 2019 noted the lack of a connected pedestrian and bicycle network in the community. Over three-fourths (27 of 35) of the recommended projects in the Complete Streets Plan addressed pedestrian deficiencies, including sidewalks and ADA-compliant curbs. However, the Plan also noted the challenges of limited available right-of-way to add new sidewalks and bicycle lanes.

The 2007 Master Plan noted similar challenges with creating a more extensive, connected sidewalk system. Since 2007, the Town has added some sidewalks and bike lanes, most notably along Pine Street and in the Town Center, but many of the sidewalk priorities in the 2007 Master Plan have not been implemented. There are also sidewalk gaps along major corridors like Route 1A. The Town's 2022 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self-Evaluation Plan noted \$33 million in needed improvements to the existing sidewalk, curb ramp and crosswalk network to meet accessibility needs.

Economic and demographic changes are shifting the burdens on the transportation network. With more residents working from home and travelling locally, less parking is needed at the commuter rail station. With growth in school-aged children as

well as more seniors, there is a growing demand for alternative means of mobility such as walking, cycling, and transit.

## Commuting Characteristics

### Commutes

Graph T-X -X shows the commute data for Norfolk, based upon data of five-year averages from the American Community Survey. Approximately 69% of Norfolk residents who work drive most days, with 8% taking transit and 21% working from home. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 80% of residents drove, 10% used transit, and 8% worked from home.

Norfolk residents are more likely to work from home compared to residents in other parts of Massachusetts, as well as compared to the Greater Boston/MAPC region and nearby communities (known as the "Southwest Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP) subregion1" of MAPC). Norfolk also has relatively higher transit use compared to the SWAP subregion as a whole, likely due to the commuter rail station and GATRA transit service.

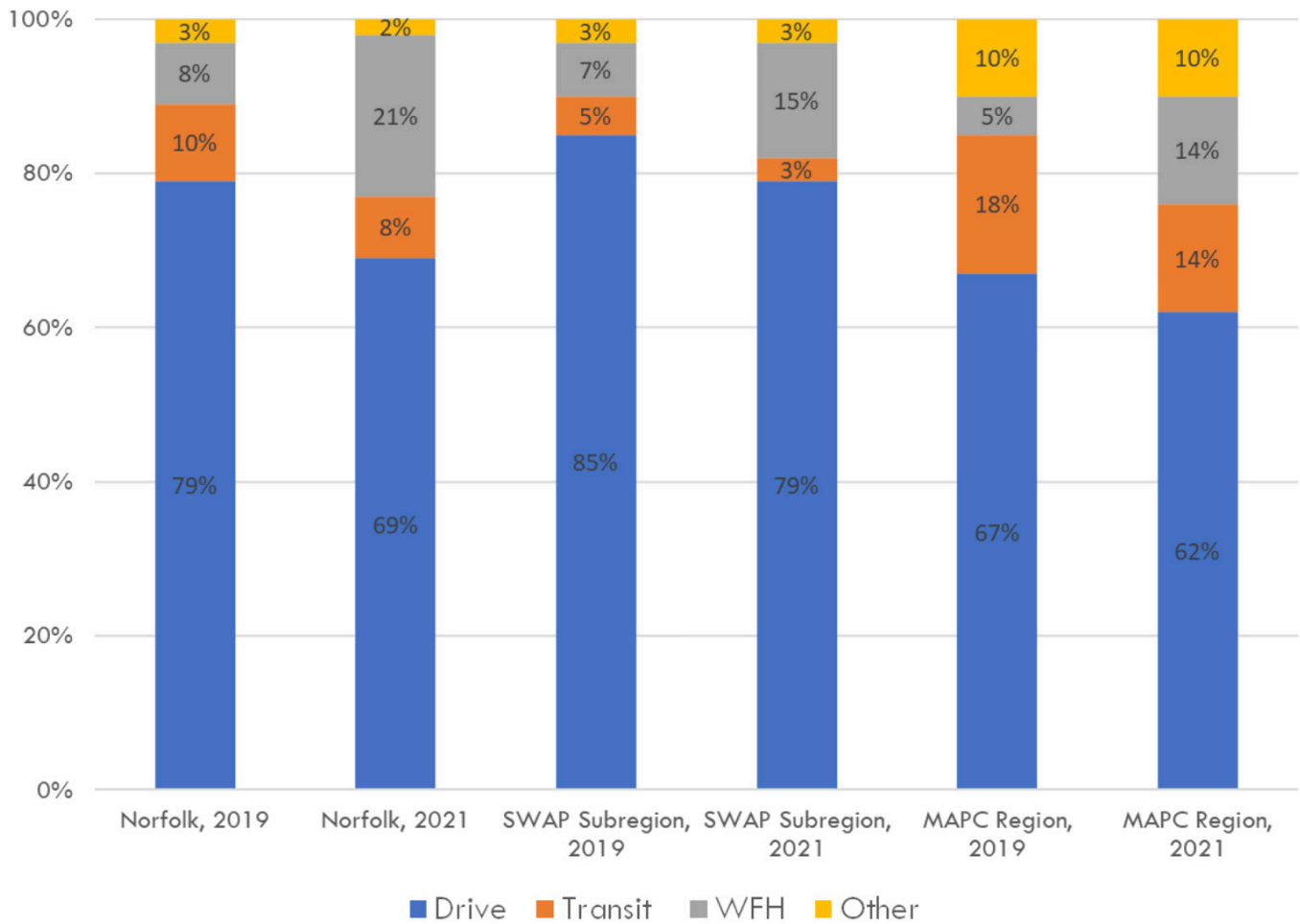
## Transportation Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Travel patterns, particularly work-related trips, have changed for many during the pandemic. Most office workers in 2020 and into 2021 worked from home remotely, and most schools and universities held remote learning as well in 2020. These changes have led to significant adaptations in auto, walking, biking, and transit trips in Greater Boston, some of which have continued into 2022 and 2023.

For Norfolk, the pandemic has led to more people working from home, with fewer driving and transit work trips. MassDOT vehicle counts for 2022 and 2023 on I-495 in Milford and on I-95 in Foxborough are lower than pre-pandemic counts. However, vehicle miles travelled in Norfolk streets in 2021 are now higher than pre-pandemic levels.

The longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on travel

## Changes in Work Commute Modes, Norfolk and Region (2019-2021)



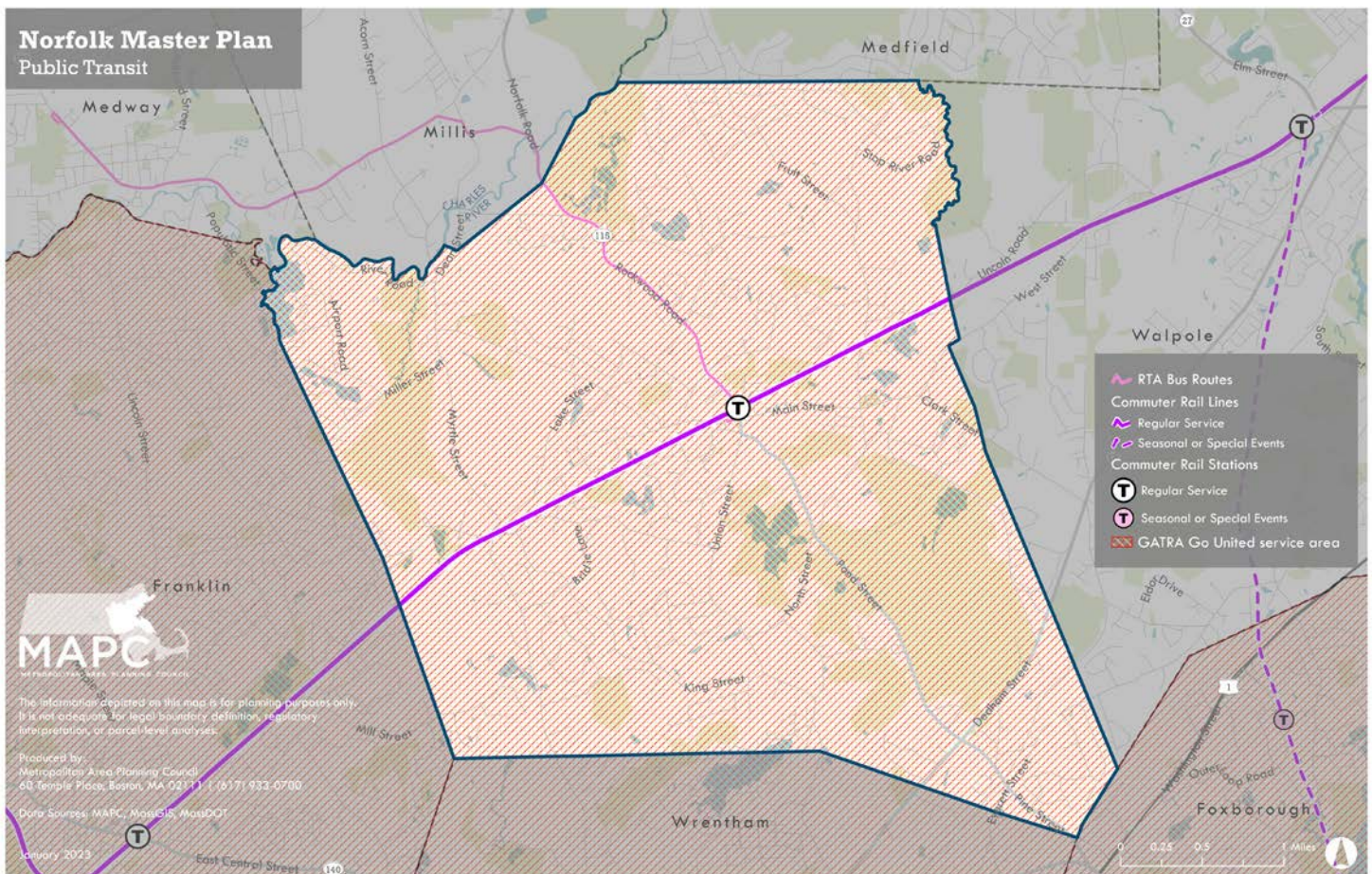
are unknown; however, recent data and surveys suggest that while some workers may choose to work remotely full time, many who can work from home will return to their work sites two to three days per week. Those working in food services, education, and health care (many of whom continued to work on site during the pandemic) will continue to commute to their jobs, but with changes in their work and commute patterns.

Employee surveys, MBTA ridership data, and MassDOT vehicular traffic data show that workers in Greater Boston are now choosing to drive to work more often, and to use transit less when they commute. Those who work from home may also be choosing to drive more locally during the mid-day,

whether for lunch or running errands.

Retail and restaurants will evolve with workers interfacing less with customers and instead fulfilling and delivering online orders, creating shifts in traffic generation and parking needs.

Finally, more people chose to bicycle during the pandemic, mostly as a form of recreation. According to MassDOT, Norfolk saw a greater than 50% increase in bicycle travel in 2021 when compared to 2019. The data are not clear if this trend will continue, and whether more workers are now choosing cycling to work or students are cycling to school.



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## Public Transit Commuter Rail

Norfolk’s commuter rail station prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the busiest on the Franklin line, averaging over 800 boardings on an average weekday in 2018. The MBTA operates two parking areas with approximately 575 spaces, charging \$4 per day or \$70/month for parking privileges. The lot also has dedicated outdoor space for bicycle parking. Prior to the pandemic, the Town experienced parking challenges in the downtown area with commuter rail riders parking all day while riding the Franklin Line. The MBTA commuter lots are used less now, as more workers who used to commute into Boston on weekdays are now working from home all or part-time. The MBTA estimates that as of October 2022 commuter rail ridership systemwide was around 76% of pre-pandemic levels. However, the MBTA has not released average weekday commuter rail ridership by line or station since 2018.

## GATRA

GATRA offers two general transit services in Norfolk. The Medway Shuttle connects portions of Medway to the commuter rail station in Norfolk, operating three runs in the morning and three in the late afternoon weekdays. GATRA also offers GATRA Go United, an on-demand microtransit service to any place in Norfolk, Franklin, Wrentham, and Foxborough. Rides can be arranged via the GATRA Go app, similar to ridehailing services like Uber and Lyft. GATRA Go United provides service weekdays, typically 8 am to 6 pm, depending on demand. The GATRA Go United service replaced the Tri-Town Connector fixed-route bus service in Norfolk, Wrentham, and Foxborough.

GATRA also provides on-demand medical and other transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities, described in the next section.

Map T-X shows the transit services in Norfolk.

## **Senior/Disabled Transportation**

GATRA offers dial-a-ride services for Norfolk residents aged 60 and over and to persons with a disability, with curb-to-curb service within Foxborough, Franklin, Norfolk, and Wrentham, as part of the GATRA Go United microtransit service. GATRA also offers the Miles for Health service that provides medical rides to seniors and persons with disabilities in Norfolk for medical appointments in various locations each day of the week, including Boston.

The Norfolk Senior Center/Council on Aging (COA) recently acquired a van (on loan from GATRA) to offer its own dial-a-ride services for senior residents and residents with disabilities to supplement the GATRA dial-a-ride services. The van operates two days a week and averages 31 passengers per month. Most trips are primarily for medical appointments and rides to the grocery store for seniors in town. The COA note that many seniors do not have smart phones or are not comfortable downloading and using the GATRA app for on-demand transportation, although GATRA does offer the option of booking trips via a phone call.

The Norfolk COA coordinates with HESSCO (the regional Area Agency on Aging) to provide meal deliveries to approximately 30 seniors/persons with disabilities.

According to COA staff, transportation continues to be a challenge as residents age and cannot or should not be driving. Most medical appointments are to facilities outside of Norfolk, creating dispatching and scheduling challenges for the COA and GATRA. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteer drivers also provided transportation. The COA is considering adding volunteer drivers again, but there are concerns with driver insurance and liability policies.

In 2021, the Town was awarded a state grant to create a “senior walking district” with new benches at the Senior Center and Town Hill plus crosswalk safety improvements.

## **Employer Shuttles**

There are no known employer-sponsored shuttles operating in Norfolk, and the Town is not an official member of a Transportation Management Association (TMA) that coordinates carpooling, vanpools, or operates shuttles for businesses and/or municipalities. However, the Neponset Valley TMA includes Norfolk in the list of towns it serves. In December 2021, MAPC produced a Neponset Valley Route 1/1A Corridor Mobility Study for the TMA. Norfolk was included in the study area and the study recommended new and expanded microtransit services in the area.

## **School Transportation**

According to Town school staff, many students use the bus to get to and from school, while some are driven by parents or others. Two schools, Freeman-Kennedy School and H. Olive Day School are listed as Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) partners at the Massachusetts SRTS website. The partnership allows schools to receive technical assistance in designing, implementing, marketing, and evaluating initiatives to encourage more walking and cycling to schools. However, the lack of walking, cycling, and transit infrastructure in town creates challenges for children in lower-income households in getting to school, as well as having transportation for afterschool activities.

## **Existing Networks**

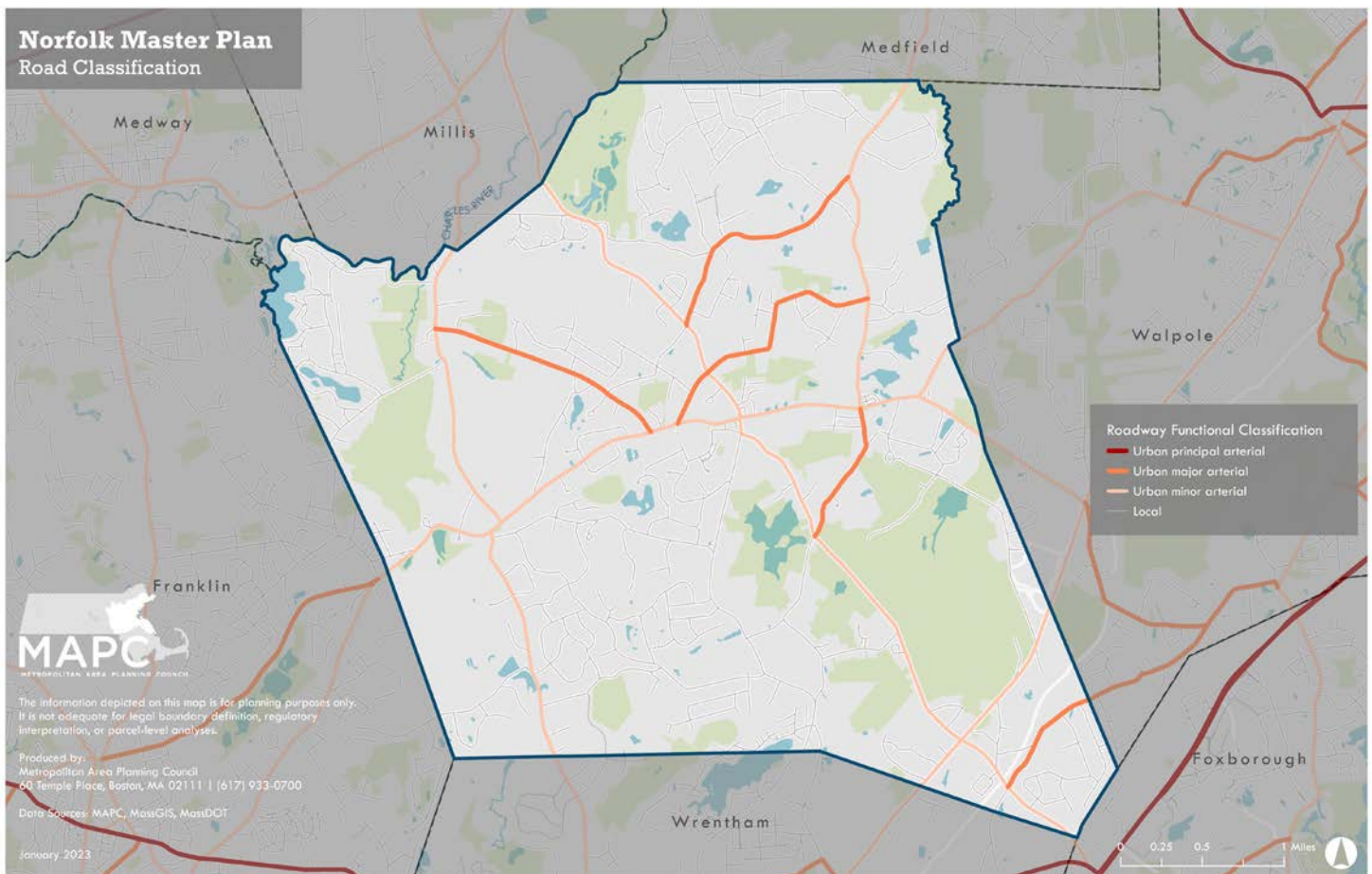
### **Roads and Streets**

According to MassDOT, Norfolk has approximately 85 miles of streets, with over 76 miles Town-owned. Three-fourths of the roadways (approximately 64 miles) are local streets, with approximately 17 miles classified as urban minor arterials/rural major collectors and 6.4 miles classified as urban collector/rural minor collectors. Map T-X shows the streets and their classifications.

### **Street and Roadway Management**

According to the Town, nearly half of its asphalt roadways are in poor condition, and MassDOT also notes that more than half of MassDOT controlled streets in Norfolk are in Fair or Poor condition. According to the Town, the annual





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budget for all street repairs and construction (including sidewalks, crosswalks and ramps) is approximately \$500,000, with most coming from the Town’s Chapter 90 funding allocation from the Commonwealth. The Town maintains a pavement management program that identifies the condition index of each road, and the Norfolk Department of Public Works (DPW) has stated in the FY23 Capital Improvement Plan that the Town needs to significantly increase its commitment to road repair to bring its streets and roads to an acceptable level of condition. The Town’s current roadway repair backlog is over \$17 million (not including drainage or sidewalks), in addition to \$33 million needed to bring the Town’s existing sidewalks, curb ramps, and crossings to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities (ADA).

All bridges in the Town are rated by MassDOT in Good or Fair condition. However, Town staff note that many of the Town’s culverts and drainage

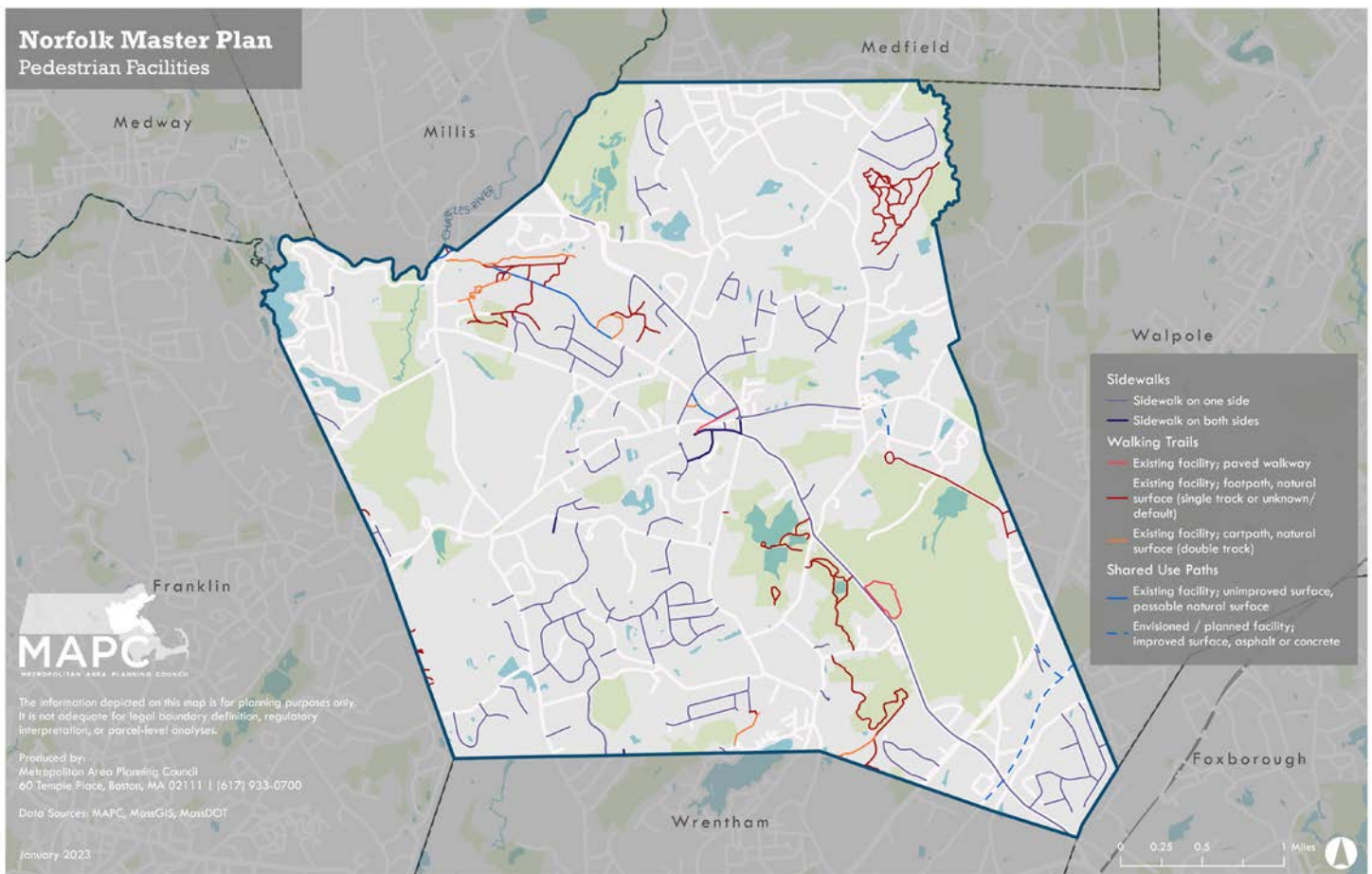
pipes have outlived their service life.

**Pedestrian and Bicycle**

Only a third of Norfolk’s roads and streets have sidewalks (28 of 85 miles). Most of those sidewalks are on local neighborhood streets, and only Pond Street, as well as portions of Rockwood Road, Main Street and Boardman Street provide sidewalk connectivity on busier streets (major and minor arterials). As shown in Map T-X, the existing sidewalks are mostly disconnected and nearly all existing sidewalks are on only one side of the street.

The Town also has several walking trails, mostly unpaved, that traverse through municipal and state parks and wildlife sanctuaries. There are no dedicated bicycle facilities in the Town. Map T-X shows the Town’s pedestrian facilities.

The lack of sidewalk and trail connections can



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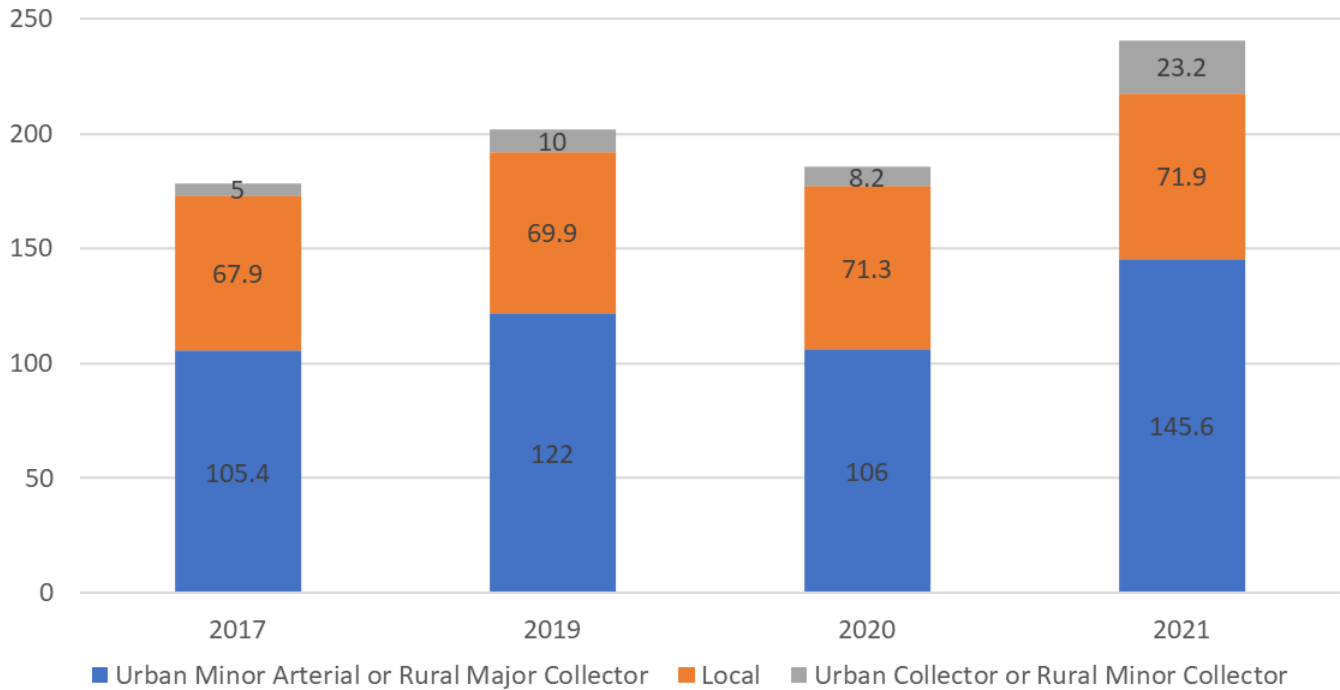
create challenges for those who cannot drive, including persons with disabilities, older adults, those under the age of 16, and households without automobiles and even some single-vehicle households. These challenges can be amplified when the existing sidewalks and trails do not always connect residents to schools, recreation, and daily needs like grocery stores. The lack of walking and cycling infrastructure also means more trips done by car, leading to more localized traffic congestion and limiting opportunities for daily outdoor exercise and activity.

The Town has investigated other regional trails such as the Metacomet Greenway that would connect from Walpole through Norfolk to Wrentham along the old Metacomet railway right-of-way. The Metacomet Greenway would be part of MAPC's larger Landline Plan of greenways, pathways, and trails connecting the region. The Landline envisions an additional trail running generally north-south,

using a combination of local streets, nature areas, unused railways, and/or utility easements (see map call out). It should be noted the Landline route is conceptual and may be changed.



## Annual Vehicle Miles Travelled in Norfolk (thousands)



### Vehicle Ownership and Traffic Volumes

MassDOT Vehicle Census data<sup>6</sup> show that there are 9,465 registered vehicles in Norfolk, with around 4% of those hybrid or electric vehicles. Norfolk drivers average 27 miles per day, similar to the statewide average of 26 miles/day.

According to US Census data, over 90 percent of Norfolk households have at least one vehicle, with around half of Norfolk households having two vehicles. Both figures are higher than the MAPC region (84 percent and 35 percent, respectively). Due to Census data limitations, the percent and locations of zero car households in the Town is unknown, but could be between 1 and 3 percent (approximately 50 to 100 households).

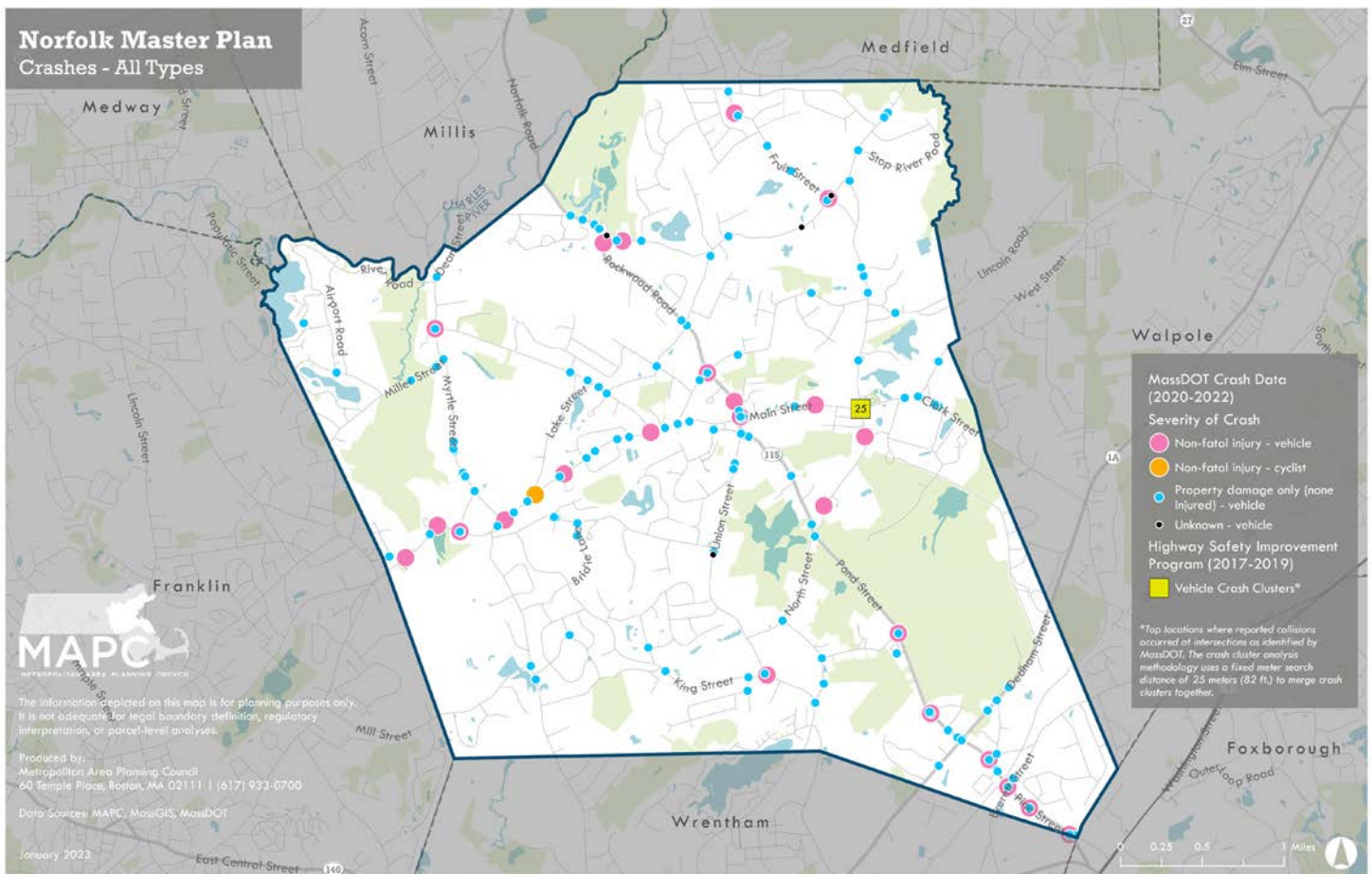
According to MassDOT data, streets such as Medway, Cleveland, Boardman, and Needham Streets have average annual daily volumes (AADT) of 2,500-3,500 vehicles. Pond Street and Rockwood Road have volumes around 7,000 vehicles and more travelled streets such as Main Street, Myrtle Street, and Seekonk Street have daily volumes of 8,500-10,500 vehicles.<sup>7</sup> Based upon these traffic volumes, all streets operate at

an acceptable Level of Service (LOS) for vehicular traffic.<sup>8</sup> However, there are locations where peak-period traffic can create problems, such as around schools during student pick-up and drop-off and at the commuter rail station, when the train blocks Rockwood Road while picking up and discharging passengers.

Annual Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) in the Town has increased 35% since 2017 (see Figure T-X), with most of that growth on Urban Minor Arterials such as Main Street, Pond Street, North Street and Rockwood Road. However, as noted above, more residents are working from home. These data suggest that people are taking more non-work auto trips in town, such as shopping, coffee/lunch breaks, and driving family members to school or after-school activities. These are also likely shorter local trips than the longer work-based auto trips prior to the pandemic.

### Traffic Safety

Norfolk had 99 reported crashes in 2022, the highest since 2014 and a 13% increase over 2019 (per MassDOT IMPACT portal). One of the crashes in the last three years involved a pedestrian. Map



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T-X shows the distribution and severity of crashes for the last three years. Most crashes are along Main Street, Rockwood Road, and Pond Street. The intersection of Main Street/Needham Street/Seekonk Street is in MassDOT's top five percent intersection crash clusters in the Commonwealth.

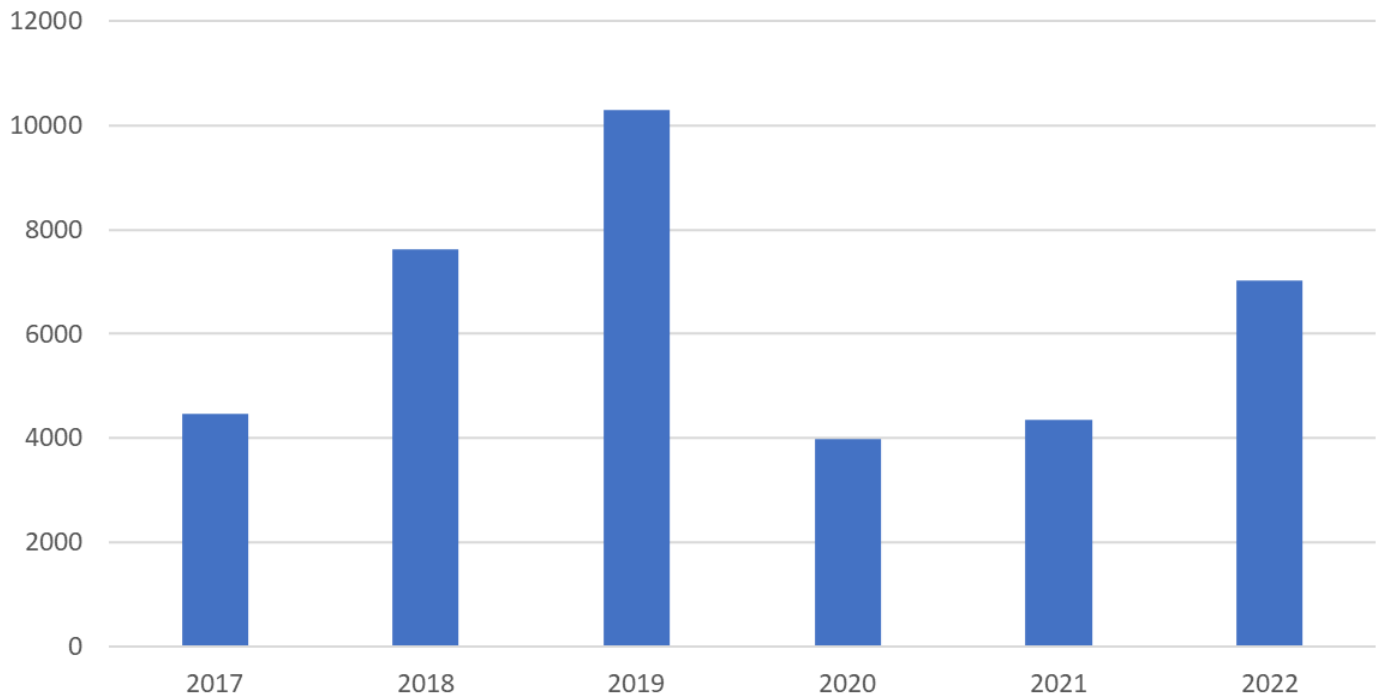
## Parking

Based upon data collected, Norfolk has not undertaken any previous parking studies. Prior to the pandemic, most parking challenges in Town were centered around the commuter rail station, which has approximately 575 designated spaces in three distinct areas, one on each side of Rockwood Road and a third lot along Liberty Lane. In 2018, ridership averaged over 800 weekday riders, exceeding the commuter rail parking capacity in Town. According to Town staff, residents were permitted on-street parking along Liberty Lane as overflow when demand for commuter rail parking was higher pre-pandemic.

Today, with more people working from home and fewer residents riding commuter rail, parking demand at the station has declined.

The Town's parking requirements under the Zoning Bylaws are similar to other suburban communities in the MAPC region for residential uses (e.g., two spaces per single-family residential unit). For some office and retail uses, Norfolk requires one space per 200 square feet, while other suburban municipalities require one space per 250-350 square feet. In general these suburban parking ratios may be excessive, and research increasingly shows that requiring more parking than is needed reduces land area for housing units and open space, increases housing costs, and increases traffic, congestion, and pollution. The Town's zoning requirements also require bicycle parking for the Town Center at one bicycle space for every five automobile spaces required.

## Ridehail Trips Originating in Norfolk



### Ridehailing

Norfolk had 7,029 ridehailing (e.g., Uber, Lyft) trips originate in Town in 2022, or around three-fourths of the 10,288 trips registered in 2019 (see Figure T-X). This drop and recovery in trips due to the COVID-19 pandemic mirrors similar trends across the Commonwealth. Interestingly, the average length of trips from Norfolk increased to 15 miles by 2022 versus an average of 10 miles in 2019. Thus while there are fewer ridehail trips compared to a few years ago, the trips are longer.

Of the 7,711 trips that had Norfolk as their destination, 16 percent were local (i.e., started and ended within Norfolk). For trips that started outside of Norfolk, Boston was the most popular origin (1,881 trips), followed by Foxborough (591 trips), Wrentham (487), and Plainville (349). Because trips are only reported at the municipal level, trip origins and purpose are not known.

### Freight

Norfolk is not along any designated freight corridors and does not have a significant number of businesses that receive rail or truck freight. There is a freight rail yard in Walpole northeast of Town. Route 1 in neighboring Foxboro connects with I-495, Rt. 128 and industrial areas in nearby communities.

### Previous Studies

#### Norfolk Master Plan (2007)

The Town's top transportation goals in the 2007 Norfolk Master Plan included:

- Shift the commuter rail station southeast to eliminate the blocked crossing at Rockwood Road when train is at station
- Widen Pine Street (Rt 115) and the Rt 1A/ Rt 115 intersection to accommodate increased vehicular traffic when Patriot Place opens in 2008
- Improve sidewalk and bike connections,

especially to town center, schools, and recreation areas

- Develop a roadway management program to repave/repair roads with 5-year rolling plan

Since 2007, the Town made progress on improving sidewalk and bike connections by adopting a Complete Streets policy and prioritization plan in 2019. The Prioritization Plan lists 35 projects, with the following as first year projects:

- ADA compliant curbs in Town center
- Speed signs in Freeman-Kennedy school zone
- Sing St/Eric Rd/Bridie Ln intersection stop improvements
- Designating Seekonk St, Needham St, and North St as bike routes
- Creating Miller St as a “yield roadway” corridor, by removing the yellow line and making other physical changes to encourage shared use for pedestrians, cyclists, and motor vehicle traffic in the same slow-speed travel area.

Second year and beyond projects included:

- Prioritize sidewalks along streets such as Medway Branch, Main St, Lawrence St, Holbrook St, Route 115, Unions St, North St, Everett St
- Various intersection improvements
- Shared use paths along former railways (Medway branch and Pondville railway)
- Traffic calming, specifically at Everett St/Pine St intersection and Rt 115/Rockwood Rd
- Bike lanes along Main St from Olive Day School to Rockwood Rd

## Current Transportation Projects

The Town’s current capital plan has budgeted \$125,000 annually for sidewalk and curb ramp repair and construction, while noting that the Town has \$33 million in sidewalk needs.

The Town in recent years has allocated less than \$500,000 annually for roadway construction

and maintenance, mostly from MassDOT Chapter 90 apportionments. In 2023, the Town’s DPW requested additional Town funds to increase the roadway funding to \$1 million annually to meet the increasing needs to bring the Town’s streets to minimum acceptable conditions.

The most recent MassDOT funded projects in the Town are the roundabouts and other improvements in downtown (2004) and the sidewalk and reconstruction of Route 115 from Needham Street to Route 140 (2013). The current Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization (Boston MPO) Transportation Improvement Plan does not include any projects in Norfolk.

## Other Considerations

The Town’s parking policies should be reviewed to determine if they align with new data on typical parking needs for residential and commercial uses. Revising the policies could support affordable housing and neighborhood-based retail, as parking requirements increase the cost of housing and commercial developments.

The Town should revise zoning to allow for more neighborhood retail that is within walking and cycling distance, particularly for existing 40B neighborhoods and lower-income households, seniors, and teenagers. Transportation is a means to connect to and access daily needs – including food. Smaller, neighborhood retail and restaurants that are more easily accessible on foot and by bicycle can not only reduce vehicular traffic, but provide needed for access and gathering places for residents who cannot drive, such as teenagers, seniors, and persons with disabilities, as well as zero-car households. Neighborhood retail such as coffee shops and small stores can create an additional “public realm” where residents can connect, reducing isolation and loneliness for groups, particularly older adults.



## Topic Brief

# Historical and Cultural Resources

### Quick Facts

- Hometown of Albert “Allie” Moulton who is the only known African American to play in Major League Baseball before Jackie Robinson.
- 343 historic and cultural sites inventoried with the Massachusetts Historical Commission
- 3 National Register Districts
  - Wrentham State School
  - Rockwood Road
  - Sullivan’s Corner
- 3 properties with preservation restrictions
- In 2022, Norfolk Cultural Council distributed \$7,200 in grants to 17 individuals, groups, and nonprofit organizations that provided programming centering around the arts, humanities, history, and interpretive sciences for children, adults, and intergenerational groups.
- In 2021, Norfolk’s Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation sector reported 93 jobs, based on average monthly employment and 7 industry establishments.
- The Town of Norfolk Fiscal 2022 General Budget allocated \$812,063 toward Culture and Recreation, in the 2023 General Budget request was for \$891,176 which is a 9.7% increase. Most of the Cultural and Recreation budget line item is dedicated to the library and recreation, with less than \$1,000 for annual expenditures for the Historical Commission and Memorial Day.

### Key Issues

- To gain a deeper understanding of Norfolk’s history, it is crucial to establish an interpretive framework. Despite the town having an abundance of historical information, there is currently a lack of structure to help organize it.
- There is a lack of a comprehensive “master” planning approach for prioritizing and managing work related to historical assets.
- The funding allocated for projects related to historical assets may not be sufficient.
- Specifically, there are challenges in effectively utilizing Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds in the historic category, as highlighted by the Community Preservation Committee.
- It is essential to recognize that historical preservation and historical memory should not solely focus on the stories of the dominant culture, but also encompass the diverse histories of all communities. This can be achieved through research, interpretation, and education programs that highlight the contributions and experiences of all members of a community.
- Cultural programming is supported by a broad network of stakeholders throughout the region, though there is an opportunity to strengthen these collaborations to provide more consistent activities for Norfolk residents.
- Given the current land use, there are few areas that support more commercial activities that provide entertainment or places for people to gather formally or informally.

# Historical and Cultural Resources

## Introduction

In 2006, the Norfolk Historical Commission enlisted the services of Kathleen Bloomer to conduct a comprehensive survey of historical sites throughout the town. The goal was to update the records with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) by identifying and documenting important buildings and landmarks, highlighting their historical significance. To further the effort of the town to highlight its historical assets, the commission has created a walking tour to showcase notable sites located in the downtown area.

The Historical Commission has also undertaken a project called “Norfolk Stories,” where they collected and published a series of oral histories. These stories captured the memories and perspectives of long-time residents and individuals who have strong connections to the town, providing valuable insights into Norfolk’s history. Currently, volumes 1 and 2 are on sale at the Town Clerks’ office.

The Historical Commission’s dedication has positioned the town to build upon past achievements effectively. Moreover, the community’s steadfast support for preserving historical assets as integral to the town’s identity reinforces their prioritization. With this work and widespread backing, Norfolk is poised to make substantial and meaningful progress.

Historical preservation plays a crucial role in safeguarding and celebrating the distinct character and heritage of a place. It not only preserves the tangible aspects, such as buildings and landmarks, but also the intangible elements, including stories, traditions, and cultural identities. By protecting and promoting historical sites, communities can maintain a sense of identity, strengthen local pride, and foster a greater understanding of their past.

Moreover, historical preservation contributes to the sustainability of a place in multiple ways. Economically, it can attract tourism, create heritage-based businesses, and enhance property values. Environmentally, preserving historic structures reduces the need for new construction and promotes sustainable practices, thus minimizing the environmental impact. Socially, historical preservation fosters a sense of community, provides educational opportunities, and offers shared spaces that promote cultural exchange and civic engagement.

Norfolk’s cultural resources are embedded throughout daily life and activities, supported and created by a broad range of stakeholders and participants. Like many towns in Massachusetts, Norfolk’s cultural events and programming take place in local schools, the library, the senior center and the Town Common. Investment in these public resources enables the Town to support a diversity of programming and social connections. Norfolk’s cultural life is nurtured by the leadership of Norfolk Cultural Council, as well as other local groups, such as the Norfolk Lion’s Club, which provide funding and support community events. Furthermore, Norfolk is home to multiple artists and cultural businesses that provide opportunities for ongoing cultural programming.

Cultural events and activities are integral to community life, and by extension areas of open space recreation planning, public health, economic development and public services. Norfolk also has an active creative economy including local businesses, artists and craftsmen.

## Historical and Cultural Stakeholders

### Norfolk Historical Commission

The Norfolk Historical Commission is composed of seven appointed members, and there are additional associate members who are elected by the commission. Their primary role is to collect and preserve historical records, including documents, photos, and various materials that pertain to different aspects of Norfolk’s history. Furthermore,



they have undertaken the responsibility of safeguarding present-day items that may hold historical significance or be of interest to the community in the future. They also administer the Demolition Delay bylaw. As noted earlier, they last commissioned a historic and architectural survey in 2006. A member of the Historical Commission serves on the Community Preservation Committee, providing a necessary partnership between two similarly-focused groups.

### **Norfolk Cultural Council**

The Norfolk Cultural Council (NCC) is part of a network of local cultural councils serving all cities and towns in Massachusetts funded by Massachusetts Cultural Council. The primary role of Norfolk Cultural Council is to “support public programs that promote education, diversity and excellence in the arts, humanities and interpretive science in Norfolk and across the Commonwealth.”

The NCC is composed of volunteer committee appointed by the Select Board, and the council approves funding for activities based on grant applications submitted to the council. The NCC considers the benefit to the community and the population segments served and favors programs that occur at a local venue or are sponsored by local organizations. NCC’s grant process opens in September, and there can be as many as 23 members, currently there are only 5.

In the past, Norfolk Cultural Council hosted events, including Juried Art Exhibitions and Concerts on the Town Common. Many programs are hosted in partnership with the Senior Center, Norfolk Library, Recreation Department, or the Norfolk Lions Club. Regional organizations funded by NCC include the Un-Common Theater Company, LiveARTS, the Neponset Choral Society, and Massachusetts Audubon.

### **Norfolk Public Library and Friends of the Norfolk Public Library**

Norfolk Public Library is a critical community anchor for cultural life in town and provides services that serve all ages. The Community Room at the Norfolk Public Library hosts many creative activities, including storytelling, music classes,

watercolor meetups, book club, Minecraft, and a fiber art group, among other activities, to meet the needs of community members. The Community Room also hosted a variety of exhibits from local groups and artists. Some highlights include shawls spun from yarn created by the Sunday Spinners, quilts created by a local quilting group, the annual photography exhibit from the Stony Brook Camera Club, and the annual display of the art entrants from the Norfolk Lions’ Community Day competition.

Friends of the Library is a nonprofit organization that provides additional support to the library with additional materials, programs, and services not funded by the library’s normal operating budget. In 2022, Friends of the Library funded activities including reading programs, cooking clubs, dance classes, art programs, music classes, gardening, and author talks.

### **Norfolk Senior Center - Council on Aging**

Norfolk Senior Center, managed by the Council on Aging, provides services and supports for residents 60 years and older in the Town. The Norfolk Senior Center hosts monthly events that include a variety of cultural activities, including a knitting and crocheting club, book club, a series of games (e.g., bingo, bridge, cribbage, mahjongg, and whist), hosts exercise and wellness classes (e.g., cycling, qigong, reflexology, tai-chi, yoga, and Zumba) and hosts informational talks as well.

### **Local Arts and Culture Businesses**

Norfolk is home to local artists across creative disciplines and arts-based small businesses and entrepreneurs alike. Performers based in Norfolk range from theater groups like the Inspiration Performing Troupe, to local musicians including the Hipshot Band, to Tommy James Magic Shows. While based in Norfolk, each of these groups are known to perform regionally throughout New England.

Other cultural anchors include Exhale School of Dance, Ivy Music Academy, Norfolk Piano, which offer classes and lessons for community members of all ages. Artists teach out of both commercial

and residential studios. In addition to performance artists, Patchwork Community Craft hosts classes and workshops in sewing and other fiber arts. Patchwork also serves as a resource exchange center for folks to donate and purchase new and second-hand fabric and has a lending library for fiber arts tools. In 2016, Glenn Nichols has been operating Retrograde Guitars in town, specializing in custom handmade guitars and professional restorations. Finally, Tiki Tattoo recently relocated to Norfolk in July 2022 from Millis, MA.

While there are few performance venues in Norfolk, businesses like Cilla's Coffeehouse (now closed) provided opportunities for local artists to exhibit their work and provide a venue for small events.

## **Community Based Organizations**

### **Norfolk Lions Club**

The Norfolk Lions Club was established in 1958 and serves as an active volunteer club that aims to add value to the local quality of life in Norfolk. The Lions Club is responsible for multiple town-wide events, including Community Day, Polar Plunge, Christmas Tree Sales, the Santa Parade, Chili Fest, and the Haunted Train Ride. The Lions Club also supports the Norfolk Community Garden in partnership with Norfolk Grange.

### **Norfolk Community League**

In 1974, six women formed Norfolk Organization for Various Activities (NOVA) to provide a meeting ground for sharing interested, talents and ideas when many people were moving to Norfolk during an economic boom where many families were relocating to Norfolk. The intention of the organization was to encourage participation in civic and social activities in the community, and in the 1990s the name was changed to Norfolk Community League. Today, the group hosts events and provides grants for local entities, including the King Philip Drama Club, and other organizations that support the public school system and the library, which are supported through fundraising events like the Norfolk Community Gala, Community Day Weekend 5K, supporting the Haunted Train Ride, and the Wood Duck Derby.

### **Norfolk Grange**

Norfolk Grange is part of the Massachusetts State Grange, whose mission is to bring people together to build strong communities by encouraging agriculture and environmental sustainability, community service and future leaders. Locally, the Norfolk Grange appears to operate as a community service organization that supports ongoing social events in Norfolk, and also supports the Norfolk Community Garden. Norfolk Grange hosts events around environmental sustainability. Norfolk Grange is located in a building that is recognized by the National Register of Historic Places and was home to multiple faith communities and served as a meeting hall, voting location, and library throughout the twentieth century.

### **Norfolk Community Television (NCTV)**

Norfolk Community Television was formed in 1986 as a nonprofit that provides local coverage and access to training and equipment for a variety of topics and software to prepare community members to create their own public access shows. NCTV Rewind is a notable community-wide project, that is working to digitize tapes of old media of community events to document town history. NCTV provides a critical communication resource for community events as they broadcast public, education, and government channel. It is a volunteer run organization. Residents can borrow equipment to film outside events or come in to the studio and use the in-house equipment to record a show in the studio. The membership, training services and equipment usage are all free. There are also opportunities for internships and for nonprofits to promote programs on their digital bulletin board.

### **The Norfolk Quill**

The Norfolk Quill Literary Journal is a nonprofit organization run by community members, and offers writing workshops for all ages and publishes an annual journal of local writing in June. A Norfolk resident started the organization when she began offering a series of free writing workshops out of the Norfolk Public Library. Margo Ball, the founder has said that the motivation for starting

the Norfolk Quill was based on the “deeply held believe that ordinary people have extraordinary things to say and they out to have their words lifted up and celebrated.”<sup>2</sup> The organization supports youth members through a poetry contest and provides a place for local stories to be told.

### **Faith Communities**

The Federated Church of Norfolk, located in Norfolk Common, serves as a gathering place for community events in addition to religious events. Other faith communities based in Norfolk include Emmanuel Baptist Church, Providence Baptist Church and St. Jude Catholic Church.

### **School Activities Norfolk Public Schools**

Norfolk’s public schools include H. Olive Day School and Freeman Kennedy School, and feed into the King Philip Middle School and King Philip High School respectively. Within the schools, there are also additional resources related to arts and culture through partnerships with organizations like Norfolk Special Education Parents Advisory Council (SEPAC), which has provided art and music workshops that specifically serve youth with special needs.

### **King Philip Schools**

King Philip Middle School is a hub of visual and performing arts including an art club, jazz band and glee club. In the 2022 annual report, it was noted that the performing arts program become a source of pride in the King Philip School System, including innovations in music technology incorporated into the curriculum, as well as impressive performances at regional concerts and choral festivals. (102)

This tradition continues at the high school, at King Philip High School, where the marching band placed second in a national band competition, earning a Gold Star at State Finals and the Jazz Ensemble also earning Gold Metals at regional music festival events. Several High School Band and Chorus students auditioned for and were accepted into the Southeast Senior District Virtual Festival and the Massachusetts Music Education

Association All-State Festival. The robust music programs serving this community prove to be an important cultural anchor for the young people in Norfolk.

The King Philip Music Association (KPMA) was formed in 1986 to promote music education for the King Philip district and work with school administrators. Members include a network of alumni and current students and parents participating in the King Philip Music Program, who work to assist music staff and school administration to best support the music program. One innovative approach to funding these programs comes from the Norfolk transfer station, where bottle and can recycling helps fund the music programs associated with KPMA, where each bottle or can may be recycled for a nickel toward the program.

### **Regulatory Context Preservation funding Community Preservation Act**

The mandate of the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) in Norfolk is to fulfill three primary objectives: acquiring and preserving open space, promoting affordable housing initiatives, and providing assistance in preserving and maintaining historic properties. The committee comprises nine members who work collectively to fulfill these responsibilities, including four at large members representing town precincts. Five members are appointed by the Historical Commission, Conservation Commission, Planning Board, and Housing Authority.

### **Demolition Delay Bylaw**

The Town has adopted a demolition delay bylaw, which authorizes a review process by the Historical Commission on buildings that are on the National Register or eligible for National Register listing as well as any building or structure that is found by the Commission to be history or architecturally significant.

### **Signage Bylaws**

The definition of a sign can potentially limit the installation or approval of public art such as murals. Currently, the definition of a sign is:

“Any writing, pictorial representation, illustration, emblem, symbol, design or other figure of similar character which is a structure or a part thereof, or is attached to or in any manner represented on a building or other structure, and is placed out of doors in view of the general public and is used for purposes of advertisement, announcement, declaration, demonstration, display, identification, or expression.”

The Select Board is the sign granting authority in Norfolk for sign permits, authorization and special permits for signage throughout the town. It is unclear whether the Town has had any issues regulating signs in the context of public art.

## Peace and Good Order Regulations

A review of Norfolk's bylaws highlight where regulations may be impeding temporary or permanent public art installations. Towns should work with community members to strike a balance between regulations that prevent nuisance behavior and those that prohibit creativity, especially in places like Town Center, where art and creative placemaking efforts can contribute to neighborhood vibrancy and vitality. Some examples of regulations to potentially review include:

- Obstructions in public places, streets, and sidewalks. “No person shall leave any vehicle or material or place any obstruction in any sidewalk, street or public place and suffer the same to remain there overnight without maintaining a sufficient light and suitable guards over or near same throughout the night nor allow same to remain after notice from a police officer of Norfolk to remove same.”
- Games on streets and sidewalks. “No person shall by any means or in any manner willfully frighten any horse, or play at any game in which a ball is used, or shoot with bows and arrows, fly any kites, or throw stones or other missiles in any street or on any sidewalk.”
- Skating and sledding on sidewalks and in

public places. “No person shall skate or coast upon any sled upon any sidewalk or any street or public place except at such times and upon such streets or places as the Select Board may, by public notice, designate for such purposes.”

- Noise. Zoning Bylaw Article 6 directly addresses vibration and noise. There may be implications for how this ordinance is enforced and upheld in relationship to events and music-related businesses.
- Regulations for Body Art Establishments and Body Art Practitioners. In 2022, Norfolk Board of Health held a public hearing and adopted this policy. Noting the addition of the tattoo shop that moved to Norfolk in the same year.

## Opportunities and Constraints Opportunities

Given the rich and long history of Norfolk, from the days of King Philip to colonial times as part of the Dedham colony, there is an opportunity to capitalize on heritage tourism and continue to learn and expand the understanding of Norfolk's history, from different perspectives. Norfolk should build on existing successes, like the Town Center walking tour to promote heritage tourism, leveraging its rich history and cultural heritage.

Norfolk also should continue to work with different groups, both locally and regionally, to update and expand town history to include more underrecognized history so that it encompasses all of Norfolk's history. For example, the Historical Commission could update town page on historic homes and structures to discuss Albert “Allie” Moulton, notable African American baseball player. The history could also be expanded to better discuss the role of slavery in the development of Norfolk, citing primary source documents such as the 1754 Wrentham slave census.

Norfolk's agrarian roots and rural legacy provides an opportunity to leverage historic landscapes that have not been developed - and are cherished by residents for their contributions

to the small-town feel - for climate resiliency. This can be accomplished by returning to precontact landscapes (including marshes, dam removal – potentially work with other towns/region as it will have an impact on their flooding, etc.).

Norfolk has multiple community clubs to support broader social and cultural activities to support quality of life in the town, including some unique cultural organizations that support literary arts and an active public access television program. The Town's boards and committees should continue to support community clubs and groups who provide cultural value to living in Norfolk.

Strong performing arts programs exist for youth in the King Philip School System, and there is evidence that members of the broader community support and value these activities based on the recycling program to fundraise the recycling center.

## **Constraints**

**Planning Constraints.** While the Historical Commission is active, the Town has not completed a historic preservation plan to comprehensively inventory and prioritize historic and cultural assets and determine strategies for preservation activities. A Historic Preservation Plan serves as a guiding document that outlines strategies, goals, and priorities for preserving and promoting a town's historical assets. It identifies specific actions to safeguard historic buildings, landmarks, and cultural resources, ensuring their long-term preservation and accessibility.

Furthermore, consulting with historic preservation experts when planning and zoning efforts are undertaken can ensure that preservation and development initiatives are aligned.

**Regulatory Limitations.** Certain regulations or zoning restrictions can pose challenges to historic preservation. For example, restrictions on modifications or renovations to historic buildings may limit their adaptive reuse or hinder necessary repairs. Striking a balance between preservation and modern needs can be complex.

**Parking:** Strict parking requirements can deter adaptive reuse projects or make it difficult to preserve historical structures while accommodating contemporary needs.

**Setbacks:** Strict setback regulations can limit the ability to expand or modify historic structures, particularly if the existing building is located close to the property lines.

**Demolition Delay.** Public feedback highlighted that some historical assets have been lost. It is important that the Historical Commission and Town Planner are equipped to work with property owners to find creative solutions for adaptive reuse to avoid further loss of historical assets. A historic preservation plan could also identify the most critical assets to focus pro-active preservation efforts.

Historically, and this is the case in Norfolk, modern zoning influenced local markets and often led to the closing of small businesses. For example, currently Norfolk lacks a grocery store, but historically there had been numerous general stores in Norfolk, Deanville, City Mills and Pondville that served as the trading centers for the surrounding agricultural districts. Amending regulations to encourage a grocery store would be consistent with the community's historical traditions and heritage.

**Capacity.** There are limited facilities to support community life and youth engagement outside of schools, the library and recreational activities. There are also a limited number of volunteers to activate the funding from Massachusetts Cultural Council and serve on the Norfolk Cultural Council. Public sentiment about keeping a tight fiscal budget could limit additional programming, activities and investment.

## **Other Considerations**

The Greater Boston area is vulnerable to climate change impacts, including an increased frequency of extreme weather events. Historic buildings and sites located in flood-prone areas face risks of damage or destruction. Adapting historic structures

to be resilient to these threats is an ongoing challenge. Precontact historic landscapes should be considered for mitigation strategies.

Despite existing regulations and preservation efforts, there are instances where historically significant buildings are not adequately protected. Loopholes or insufficient legal protections may allow for demolition or inappropriate alterations to historically significant structures.

The cost of living in Greater Boston is high, and there is a shortage of affordable housing. This poses a threat to historic buildings that could be adaptively reused for housing purposes. Finding viable solutions that preserve the historical character while addressing housing needs remains a concern.

Lastly, as previously mentioned, Norfolk should expand documentation of sites related to underrecognized communities. A primary source identified as part of the master planning process is the 1754 slave census of Wrentham, as Norfolk was once a part of it. The labor provided by enslaved individuals played a significant role in the prosperity of the white residents of Wrentham, which eventually led them to successfully petition for the establishment of the Town of Norfolk.

In terms of arts and cultural resources, Norfolk is served by larger regional resources that exist in neighboring towns. Norfolk Cultural Council supports and funds activities throughout the region and in collaboration with other cultural councils. It is helpful to recognize these regional resources and facilities that also serve Norfolk residents. Below are some examples of local resources in neighboring communities.

- In Franklin, the Franklin Cultural Council is a frequent collaborator with the Norfolk Cultural Council and co-produces programming that serves the Norfolk community. Franklin has venues that host local and touring artists. Examples of this include LiveARTS is an organization based in Franklin that produces concert series and concerts at the Circle of

Friends Coffee House, which also received grants from the Norfolk Cultural Council.

- In Medfield, the Bellforge Arts Center currently under development as a multi-arts and outdoor recreation destination is only 15 minutes away from Norfolk. Located at the former Medfield State Hospital site, the organization has been hosting events since 2018 and promises to be a node of cultural activity for the region and residents of Norfolk. In the past, the Norfolk Cultural Council has partnered with Medfield to support the Medfield Porchfest.
- In Medway, some musical resources exist including Encore Music Academy and Recording Studios and Medway Piano Studios.



## Topic Brief

# Community Facilities and Services

### Quick Facts

- Norfolk relies on residents to serve on its 22 Boards and Committees, of which advise or make decisions on town finance, capital improvements, health and human services, land use and zoning, education, and Norfolk's natural resources.
- To maintain and improve its current properties, facilities, and assets, the Norfolk Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) listed over \$18 Million in project requests for FY23 and over \$89 Million in requests over the next 5 years.
- The Town of Norfolk maintains an AA+ bond credit rating, which is the second highest rating possible given by the credit rating agency Standard and Poor's. This high ranking allows Norfolk to borrow for capital projects at very competitive rates.
- Norfolk maintains 9 public buildings that total 292,013 square feet. Norfolk owns and maintains 82 vehicles with an average age of 10.7 years.
- Within the 15 square mile borders of Norfolk, there are over 90 miles of public roadways, with 74.18 miles of town-owned roadways, 1.4 miles of state roadways managed by MassDOT, and 10.8 miles of privately owned roadways.
- The Norfolk IT department supports roughly 150 users and maintains 200 email accounts.
- Norfolk maintains two enterprise funds for Water and Sewer services.
- Norfolk's Facilities Department is shared between the School District and the Municipality.

### Key Issues

- Over the last ten Town Meetings, Norfolk average attendance is just over two percent (2.16%) of registered voters. This average is below most communities in the region with a similar population and characteristics.
- The Town of Norfolk has not completed an external facilities assessment recently to inform and prioritize its capital improvement investments.
- Norfolk's Fleet includes 21 assets, or 25% of the total fleet, that are over 15 years old. Initial steps have been taken to enable Norfolk to invest in electric vehicles, however, the current fleet relies on conventional combustion engines and Town facilities can not currently support a transition to electric.
- In addition to continuing efforts to improve energy efficiency in school and municipal buildings, Norfolk needs to leverage opportunities from its facilities to produce clean energy.
- Civic engagement is imperative to the public decision-making process and Norfolk does not have a consistent, resident friendly, and equitable communication strategy or process. As the primary communication resource, the Norfolk website can be difficult to navigate and the catalog of meeting minutes and financial documents are inconsistently updated. Informational pages can be outdated and town resources are only available in English.

# Community Facilities and Services

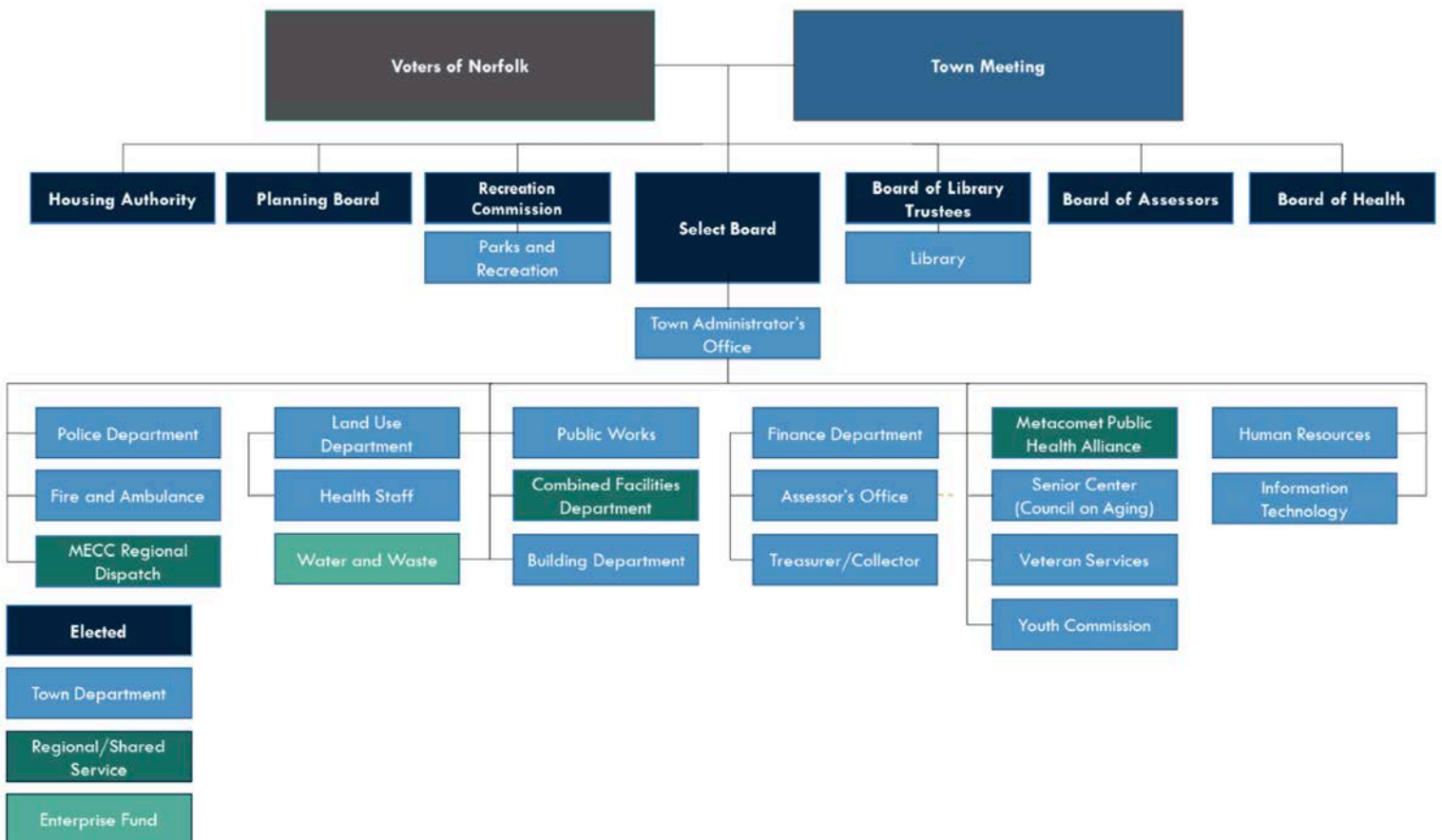
## Introduction

Norfolk's community services and facilities have undergone many changes in its 153-year history at the behest of its residents. In its current form the Town of Norfolk provides a range of services for residents that include Police, Fire, Ambulance, Public Works, Land Use, Recreation, and many others. Residents of Norfolk are able to determine the financial and other key policies of its local government by participating in the Norfolk Town Meeting. The Town requires investment, effective management, and planning to support Norfolk's current and future demands in support of the maintenance of public facilities and the development of private facilities.

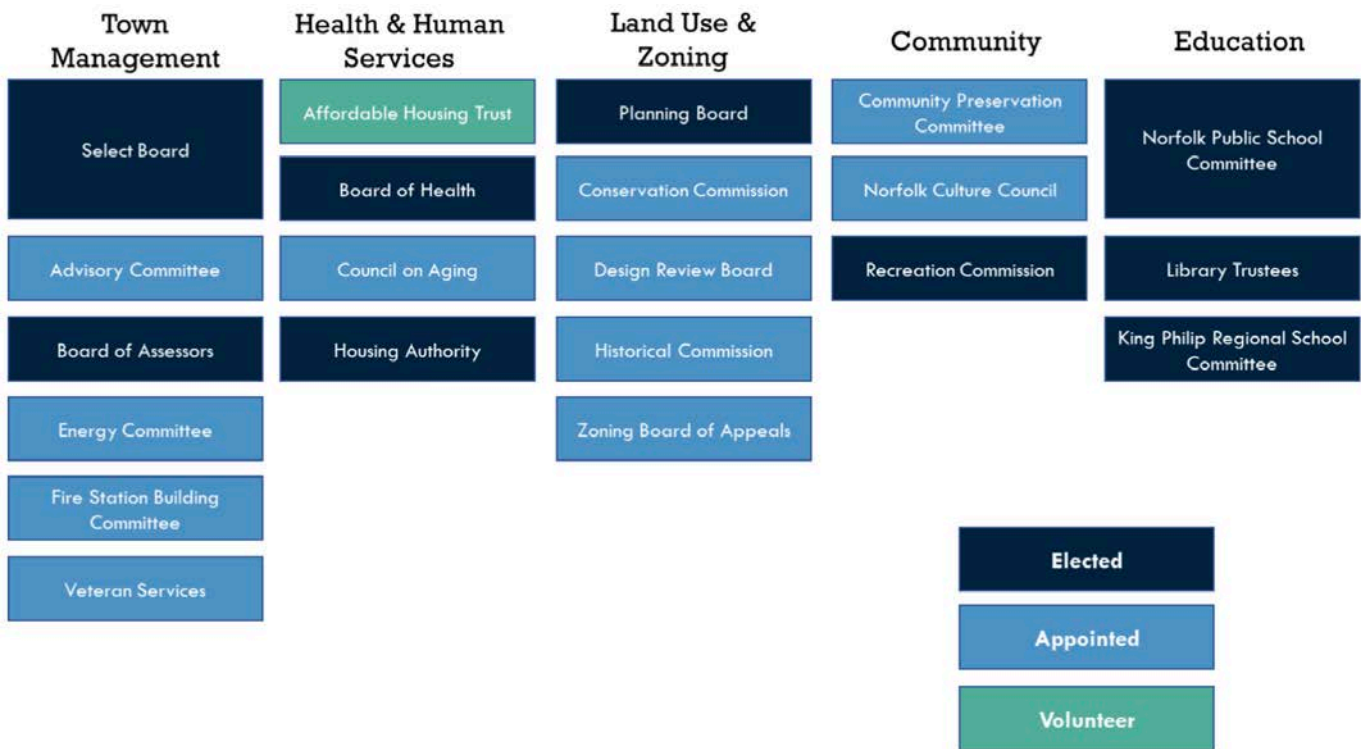
## Norfolk Boards, Commissions, and Committees

Governance of the Town is organized through 21 elected, appointed, and volunteer boards, commissions, and committees. Generally, these governing bodies can be organized around five categories - Town Management, Health and Human Services, Land Use and Zoning, Community, and Education.

The elected boards under Town Management include the Select Board and Board of Assessors. The elected boards under Health and Human Services include the Board of Health and the Housing Authority. The elected board under Land Use and Zoning is the Planning Board. The elected commission under Community is the Recreation Commission. The elected bodies under Education include the Norfolk Public School Committee, Library Trustees, and King Philip Regional School Committee.







## Norfolk Capital Improvement Plan

Since FY23, Norfolk has produced a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) which provides a thorough overview of the major capital projects planned over the next 5 years. Separating major capital projects from the annual operating budget is a well accepted best practice for municipal government and helps provide residents with a clearer understanding of the properties, facilities, and equipment that Norfolk maintains, the purpose of these assets, and how they are to be maintained in the near future.

Utilizing the ClearGov Capital Budgeting software, the CIP has become a thorough and resident friendly document. The narrative section summarizes the process for organizing and selecting capital projects, the municipal functions in which these capital projects serve, and outlines what Norfolk plans to achieve through these investments. The CIP starts with a succinct executive summary that helps residents visualize the breakdown of upcoming projects by requesting department and the source of revenue utilized to fund the investment. This section also provides a brief overview of the projects and the total costs

for the upcoming fiscal years, which is adequate to keep even the most involved residents informed. The CIP also includes an appendix that includes over 200 pages that provide more context and information about each project.

While the production and organization of the CIP is a major forward step for the quality of Norfolk's facility and asset management, there is room for improvement. The CIP outlines the process for each request, and notes that it is the responsibility of each department head to prioritize its department's requests. And while each department likely has a firm grasp of the condition of the assets it manages, Norfolk has not conducted a third-party analysis of the condition of its roads and buildings. A third-party facility and roadways analysis would provide an unbiased and object assessment of Norfolk's assets. It would ensure that Norfolk residents, administration, and elected officials have accurate data and expert insights to make more informed capital improvement decisions. This analysis could help identify cost-savings opportunities and improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the capital improvement process.

The capital improvement plan touches many other topics in the Norfolk Master Plan. There are several capital requests that are relevant to the Transportation, Economic Development, Cultural and Historical Resources, Natural Environment and Open Space, and Public Health. The capital budget is where the Town lays out its priorities for large scale projects for the next 5 years, and where the largest town deficiencies are remedied. For example, the CIP includes multiple transportation related requests. The Town has requested \$3.92 Million for Roadway Construction over the next 5 years (\$980,000 annually). There is also a request for \$625,000 (\$125,000 annually) to repair sidewalks to comply with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. These items if approved by the Select Board and voters will have a significant impact on Transportation in the community, and it is imperative that the CIP is utilized effectively to inform voters on the need for these capital projects and show the outcomes of their investment.

## **Norfolk Annual Budget FY22-FY24**

In its most current form, the Norfolk Annual Budget is a simple list of municipal departments/functions with the listed budget request alongside the previous year's approved budget. This budget format is effective in terms of receiving key approvals from the Select Board but does not provide any context of the departments receiving those funds. The current municipal budget is not resident friendly as it would be very difficult to understand the cause of budget increases or the status of ongoing department level projects without knowing where else to access that information. While great strides have been made in presenting this information using the ClearGov Transparency Center portal, the budget does not provide context on service or facility outcomes.

In FY22, Norfolk produced a Town Budget that incorporated a narrative section which included information about Town Services and outcomes. The FY22 budget was transparent. It included staffing numbers for each department, which increase the transparency and help provide

a clearer picture of the size and scale of the department. . While some of the information in the FY22 budget can be found in the Town Annual Report, including this as part of the budget would enhance the decision-making process. Residents would better understand the causes for department budget increases and better associate the impact of changing demands. This style of budgeting also present an opportunity for benchmarking, as the narrative section can include descriptive statistics for the

Each year the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Budget Presentation award is given to municipalities that issue an exceptional budget document and properly link funds allocated to services and outcomes. This style of budget is considered best practice in Municipal Government and Norfolk should strive to achieve this distinction in the near term.

The Annual Operating Budget is the fundamental framework in which the Town of Norfolk operates and exercises it's purpose. It is the financial blueprint of all municipal services. Moreover, the operating budget is a reflection of Norfolk's priorities and values as it embodies the collective vision of the residents, administrators, elected officials, and municipal staff of Norfolk.

## **Norfolk Annual Report 2020-2022**

The Norfolk Annual Report runs on a calendar basis and is a reference to many of the Town's resources and an overview of the Town's major milestones. This report includes the minutes of the year's Town Meetings, the preliminary budget, vital records, zoning bylaw amendments, and a letter from the heads of many Town departments. The Annual Report is a key communication tool for residents as it provides a comprehensive account of the year's milestones and provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of their tax dollars.

The Annual Report, specifically the department letters, are a wealth of information about the Town's Services. The letters from each department head provide valuable insight into the demand

of town departments and the efficacy of the services provided over the previous year. These letters begin with an overview of the service and include the major milestones for each department. It can also include any statistics collected and how it relates to previous years, as well as finance information.

For example, in 2022 the Department of Public Works Director included a very detailed department overview in his letter. The letter candidly detailed the rising difficulty of obtaining supplies. The letter highlighted the DPW's accomplishments, including the Highway Division's total amount and locations of replaced roadway. The letter also detailed the updated methodology of the Vehicle Maintenance Division's vehicle replacement plan. The DPW is in the process of transitioning to a 15-year vehicle replacement plan and the letter emphasizes the department's commitment in balancing long-term sustainability and financial responsibility. This informative reflection of the previous year serves as an important tool for informing residents on the status of their DPW.

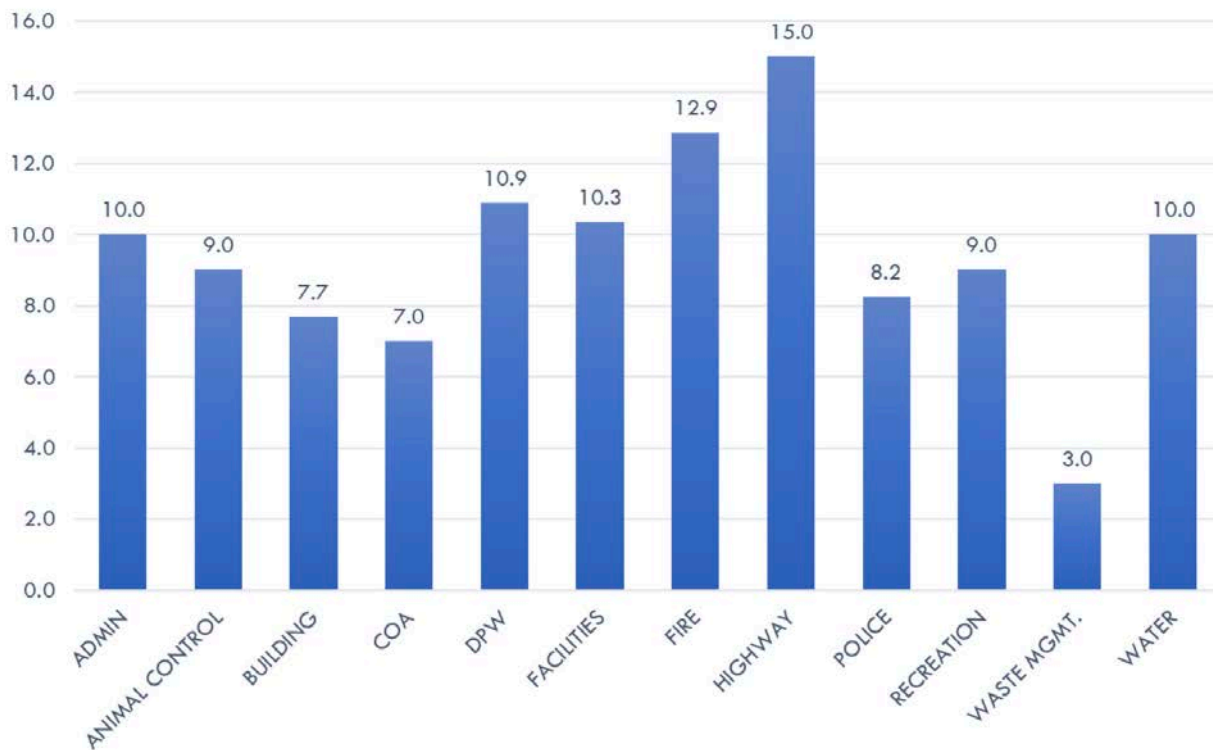
The Norfolk Annual Report is relevant to many of the functions of Norfolk Master Plan. The report makes direct reference to Land Use, Transportation, Housing, Economic Development, Public Health, Cultural and Historical Resources, and Natural Environment and Open Space.

### Basic Financial Statements and Additional Information FY22

Each year, the Town of Norfolk hires an external firm of Certified Public Accountants (CPAs) to conduct a comprehensive audit of the Town's finances. This audit provides a clear and unbiased overview of the financial health of Norfolk and is a safeguard on any errors. The audit is intended to detect any material misstatements in Norfolk's finances from either fraud or error. This take place between the completion of a fiscal year and before the budget drafting process. The last audit conducted and available is for the Fiscal Year that ended on June 30, 2022 (FY22).

FY22, Norfolk hired Roselli, Clark & Associates to conduct the audit. Highlights included:

**Average Age Of Vehicle**



- The Town's net position increased by \$2.5 Million;
- Total long-term debt decreased by \$2.1 Million;
- The Town enters FY23 with \$2.9 Million in certified free cash and \$2 Million in general stabilization funds;
- The Town was given a AA+ credit rating by S&P Global Ratings, the second highest credit rating available;
- Norfolk's capital assets total \$91.7 Million and depreciated by \$.6 Million over the year;
- State aid is expected to increase to \$4.5 Million in FY23.

## Special Legislative Acts and the Town of Norfolk Bylaws

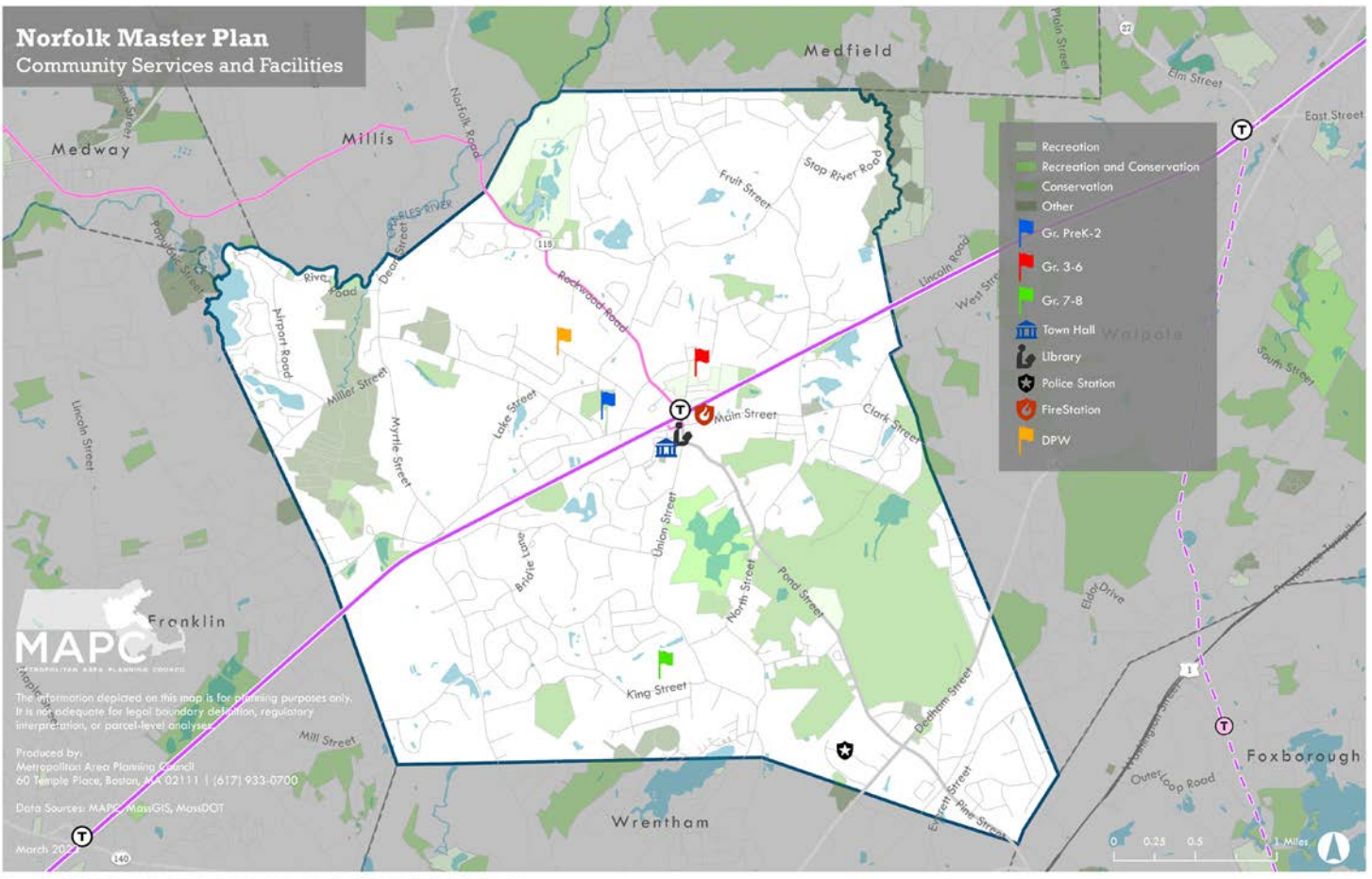
From the earliest days of the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the 10th amendment established that powers not delegated to the federal government and not expressly prohibited by the Constitution, are reserved to State Government. Municipal government is not mentioned in the Constitution. As the need for municipal government became more necessary to resolve local disputes, the courts were forced to intervene. In 1868, State Judge John F. Dillion of Iowa ruled on the issue of 'sub-state government' (aka municipalities, special districts, county government, etc.). Dillion's rule, which was later adopted by the United States Supreme Court, that municipal corporations are provided the authority to act on only the powers granted by the State. In 1966, Massachusetts voters enacted the Home-Rule Amendment to the Massachusetts State Constitution and are able to exercise powers and functions through the approval of the local legislative body, with significant limitations. These limitations include the rights to levy taxes, regulate elections, and others. While this Home-Rule provision created separation from Dillon's Rule, the authority to provide local services is outlined through legislation enacted by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Legislature.

The Massachusetts State Legislature delegates authority to municipalities in two specific ways. The first is a Home-Rule Charter, where the Town or City adopt their own local government through a charter document that outlines the structure, power, organization, and form of the local government. The process to approve a Home-Rule Charter is prescriptive and detailed. The steps includes:

- 15% of voters sign a petition to add a Charter question to the local ballot;
- Voters approve a general question of whether to pursue a charter;
- Voters elect a 9-person Charter Commission who are tasked with drafting a town Charter;
- Within 10 months, the Charter Commission produces a Draft Charter;
- Voters have 2 months to review the Draft Charter;
- The Attorney General's Office reviews the Charter for consistency with State Law;

The Town of Norfolk, like many other municipalities in Massachusetts, have formed their local government using Legislative Special Acts. In this regard a Legislative Special Act is an individual law that outlines the structure, power, organization and form of the local government. These special acts are typically approved by the local legislative body, and once passed, are submitted to the State Legislature for adoption. Any change that the local government would like to make, would also need to be approved locally and submitted to the State Legislature for approval. While it is easier to pass small legislative acts to alter the structure or operations of the municipality than passing

The use of Special Legislative Acts to serve as the governing framework create challenges in understanding the processes and authority of the Town of Norfolk. It makes it difficult to reference and understand the specifics for Norfolk's Governance. The Select Board webpage makes reference to this difficulty by defining 'The Board's



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formal, legal responsibilities are scattered through hundreds of statutes and in the Towns’ bylaws and special legislature.’ While there are limitations on local autonomy, even with a local charter, the benefits of establishing and adopting a Home Rule Charter is the community has open access to the inner workings and structure of the Town, and the process to amend the structure doesn’t require legislative approval.

**Community Services and Facilities**  
**Community Facilities**

**Town Hall - 1 Liberty Lane**

The Town Hall is a three-story structure constructed in 1988 with an alteration completed in 2004. There is a surface parking lot to the rear of the building with paved walkways to the front and rear entries of the building.

**Town Library - 2 Liberty Lane**

The Town Library is a single-story structure constructed in 2005. The library is at in the middle

of the Town Center directly adjacent to the Town Hill. It is a central feature of the community and community programming. The library has a surface parking lot accessed from Liberty Lane.

**Senior Center - 28 Medway Branch**

The Senior Center facility is a two-story structure constructed in 2001 with additional investments completed in 2003, and active construction to repair flood damage in 2023. The property includes a surface parking lot in front of the building accessed from Medway Branch.

**Police Department - 14 Sharon Avenue**

The Police Department Facility is a two-story structure constructed in 2018. A surface parking lot is located in front of the facility with access from Sharon Avenue.

**Fire Department - 117 Main Street**

The Fire Department facility is a one-story structure constructed in 1966 with an addition completed in 2004. The Town recently voted to

pass construction of a new Fire Department facility adjacent to the current facility which will bring the facility into alignment with department needs and industry standards.

### **DPW - 33 Medway Branch**

The Public Works facility is a two-story structure constructed in 1977 with an alteration completed in 1982. Exterior access includes a surface parking lot. The property also includes the Town's transfer facility, and capped Town landfill which now is partially covered by a solar array.

### **Olive Day School - 232 Main Street**

The Olive Day School facility is a single-story structure constructed in 1993 with an addition built in 1999. The property includes surface parking.

### **Freeman Kennedy School - 66 Boardman Street**

The Freeman Kennedy School is a two-story structure constructed in 2010. The property includes a large parking area, two playing fields, an open multi-purpose field, and two playgrounds.

## **Opportunities and Constraints**

### **Opportunities**

There are two ways in which municipalities use local funds for capital investment. The first is with certified free cash at the time of the project. Entering FY22, Norfolk had \$2.9 million. The second and most common, is through borrowing funds. To borrow funds, it is imperative to have a high credit rating because it enables the Town borrow at a lower interest rate. The Town was given a AA+ credit rating by S&P Global Ratings, the second highest credit rating available. A healthy amount of free cash and access to competitive interest rates provide Norfolk with an opportunity to invest in their capital resources.

Norfolk has also made strides in the long-term capital improvement planning. With the new process and documentation of the Capital Improvement Plan and the implementation Community Services of life cycle replacement strategies for IT assets and Norfolk's Fleet, Norfolk is organized and positioned to appropriately prioritize capital investment projects.

### **Constraints**

While Norfolk is organized and has available funding streams for capital investment, all funding is subject to appropriate at Town Meeting. Approximately 2% of registered voters in Norfolk attend Town Meeting. The Town needs to communicate effectively so more residents participate in the local decision making process and the ones who attend Town Meeting can make informed decisions.

### **Other Considerations**

Rising operational costs, particularly in health care, pensions, vehicle maintenance, IT, and other areas, are expected to outpace increases in revenue which poses a threat to maintaining service levels.

The current municipal labor market, particularly in specialized municipal functions including building, mechanical, finance, public health, and public safety will create challenges for maintaining local services without a proper succession and recruitment plan.

The Town of Norfolk's annual operating budget has not consistently included a narrative section. A narrative section should be easy for residents to understand, link operating expenses to outcomes and performance metrics, and meet municipal best practices for budget presentation.

The demands on the Norfolk Information Technology (IT) department will continue to rise. Investment in cybersecurity and regular external cyber assessments are vital to ensure Norfolk's assets and resident are protected. In addition to maintaining existing assets (using the 5 year refresh plan), Norfolk needs to invest in its IT department to implement operationally focused IT goals that enhance operational efficiencies.

Town facilities and infrastructure are not currently ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant, however Norfolk recently conducted a Town-wide study to identify deficiencies. Through the Capital Improvement Process, Norfolk needs to fund efforts to remediate existing buildings and ensure that all new construction is up to standards for all residents.



## Topic Brief

# Community Health

### Quick Facts

- Norfolk residents experience healthier outcomes than residents of other municipalities in the Commonwealth.
- The Norfolk Board of Health and the Metacomet Public Health Alliance work to address environmental and community health issues.
- The Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) are external factors that influence the health and well-being of individuals including social, environmental and behavioral factors. These factors can combine to affect 60% of an individual's long-term health outcomes, more than the influence of genetics and healthcare combined.
- Individual physical and mental health is dependent on multiple levels of context. Healthy people need a healthy community. A healthy community needs a healthy environment. A healthy environment needs a healthy society. In order to optimize health, mental health and well-being conditions at each of these levels need to be transformed to support health where people are born, grow, live, work, and age.

### Key Issues

- Norfolk residents partake in risky health behaviors at a slightly higher rate than residents across the Commonwealth.
- Youth and elderly populations may face additional health challenges.
- There is limited health data available at the local level.
- Healthcare access may be an issue for residents. There is one medical facility in Norfolk and residents reported needing to leave the Town for medical services.
- Norfolk's rising housing costs may cause stress and instability that could lead to poor health outcomes for residents, particularly those who are aging and transitioning to fixed-incomes.

# Community Health

## Introduction

Community health considers the factors outside of medical approaches that improve health, prevent disease, and reduce health disparities by addressing the broader foundations of health, including social, economic, and environmental conditions (AHA). Improving conditions to promote healthy living and reduce risks to well-being at the community level is essential because it provides the greatest benefits to the health of a community and elevates health equity among all residents.

## Defining Community Health Terms

**Community Health:** non-clinical approaches for improving health, preventing disease, and reducing health disparities through addressing social, behavioral, environmental, economic, and medical determinants of health in a geographically defined population. (AHA)

**Foundations of Health:** commonly referred to as Social Determinants of Health, these are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, play, and age. These conditions include quality and accessible housing, quality education, quality healthcare, recreational space, community infrastructure, employment, access to technology, the environment, and the wider set of forces and systems that shape the conditions of daily life such as poverty, racism, policy and governance, social norm and many more.

**Health Disparities:** preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations. (CDC)

**Health Equity:** a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. Achieving health equity requires focused and ongoing efforts to address historical and contemporary injustices, remove obstacles to health, and eliminate preventable health disparities. It involves acknowledging and addressing racism as a threat to public health and the history and ongoing use of unethical practices

in public health that lead to inequitable health outcomes. (CDC)

**Racism:** a system designed and constructed to benefit white people and justify the dehumanization of Black, Indigenous, and people of color that is maintained through institutional structures and policies, cultural norms and values, and individual behaviors. Racism shapes social and economic factors that put some people from racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk for negative mental health outcomes and health-related behaviors, as well as chronic and toxic stress or inflammation. Racism prevents millions of people from attaining their highest level of health, and consequently, affects the health of our nation. (Race Forward, CDC)

## Community Health and Planning

The built environment and neighborhood conditions impact individual health and well-being. Planning can improve the social, economic, and environmental conditions that make residents healthy. Integrating health considerations into planning processes can improve community health and make healthy living options accessible.

## Foundations of Health

Foundations of Health are the social, economic, and environmental conditions that exist in a community. These are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, play, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life, including housing, healthcare, recreational space, community infrastructure, employment, and education, as well as economic policies, social norms, and political systems. Research suggests that these conditions influence health behavior and together, account for 60% or more of health outcomes. These factors determine the health and well-being of a community more than the influence of healthcare and genetics combined, and work at a population level rather than the individual.

## Health Equity

The Foundations of Health have an important influence on health disparities, which are unfair





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and avoidable differences in health status. Health equity considers the history of black marginalization and the legacy of racism that has shaped society and its implications on health. Focusing on health equity creates positive conditions for all members of the community to thrive.

**Policy, Systems, and Environmental Changes**

Policy determines how decisions are made and implemented by local, state, and federal governments. Therefore, health considerations should be embedded into all levels of policymaking to improve the health of communities. (CDC) At the same time, addressing inequities embedded in the processes, practices, procedures, and norms of agencies and organizations can contribute to systemic changes that reduce health disparities. These changes can also facilitate collaboration across sectors to achieve common health goals. Planning processes can help address environmental barriers so that changes in the built environment improve the social, economic, and physical health of a community.

**Local Health System  
Norfolk Board of Health**

Norfolk residents are served by the town’s Board of Health. The work of the Norfolk Board of

Health is heavily focused on addressing regulatory health issues, which are primarily environmental health issues such as residential septic tank systems. The Board oversees the town’s Medical Reserve Corps and its Community Emergency Response Team, which are made up of volunteers prepared to assist in local public health emergencies.

**Metacomet Public Health Alliance**

The Metacomet Public Health Alliance (the Alliance) was established in the spring of 2019 as a collaboration between the towns of Franklin, Norfolk, and Wrentham to improve the health and well-being of residents by providing them with public health services and programs.

The Alliance offers a Nursing Services Program to provide comprehensive nursing services to residents of Norfolk and member communities, especially residents who face challenges due to location, mobility, and income. Nursing services include wellness programming, flu clinics, disease screenings, and disease investigations. Additionally, the nursing program aims to create partnerships to prevent disease, reduce the effects of chronic diseases, lower premature death rates, and improve the quality of life in Norfolk and member communities.

Inspectional Services are available to Norfolk

through the Alliance. A Regional Health Agent provides technical services including state sanitary code inspections such as food establishment inspections, camp inspections, swimming pool inspections, and housing/nuisance inspections. The Alliance also provides Norfolk access to a Regional Environmental Health Agent and offers Emergency Preparedness support to provide individual and family preparedness resources.

### Healthcare Access

There is one medical facility in Norfolk. The Tufts Medical Center Specialty Center in Norfolk is a clinic that offers medical care by doctors who specialize in endocrinology, breast and plastic surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, urogynecology, and rheumatology. The closest hospitals are the UMass Memorial Health Hospital in Marlborough and the Milford Regional Medical Center in Milford.

## Health Profile

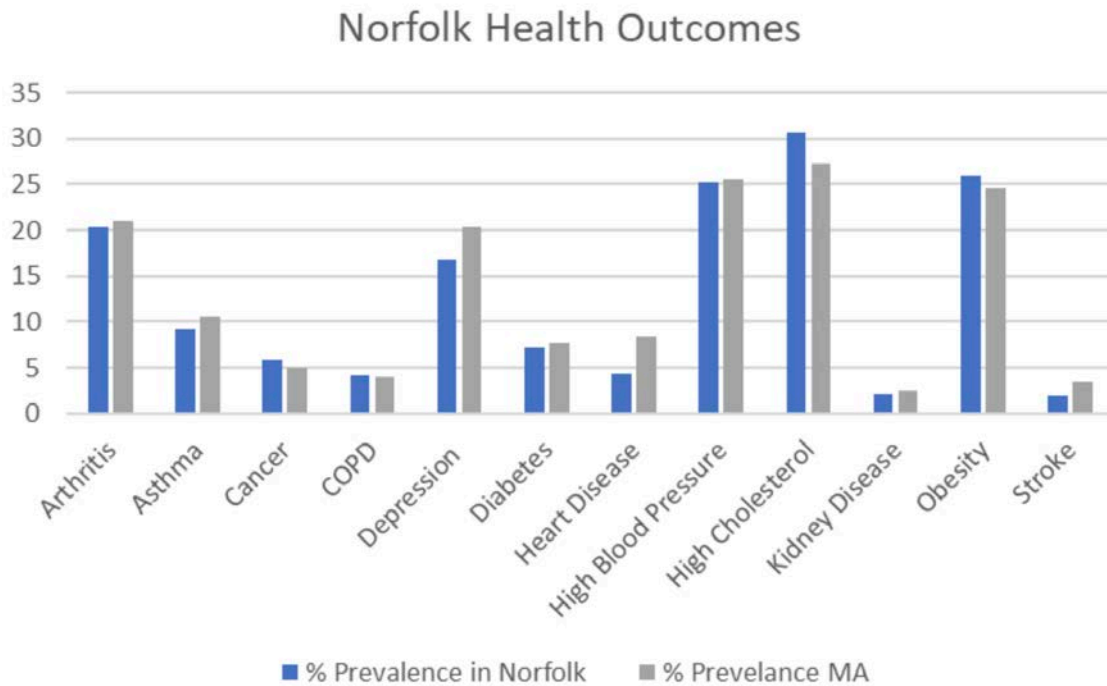
### Demographic Indicators

Public health research across the country reveals that health outcomes differ significantly by race and ethnicity. For example, people belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups experience higher rates of poor health and disease when compared to their white counterparts. Though socioeconomic factors also play a role, these racial and ethnic disparities can persist even when accounting for other demographic and socioeconomic factors, like age or income.

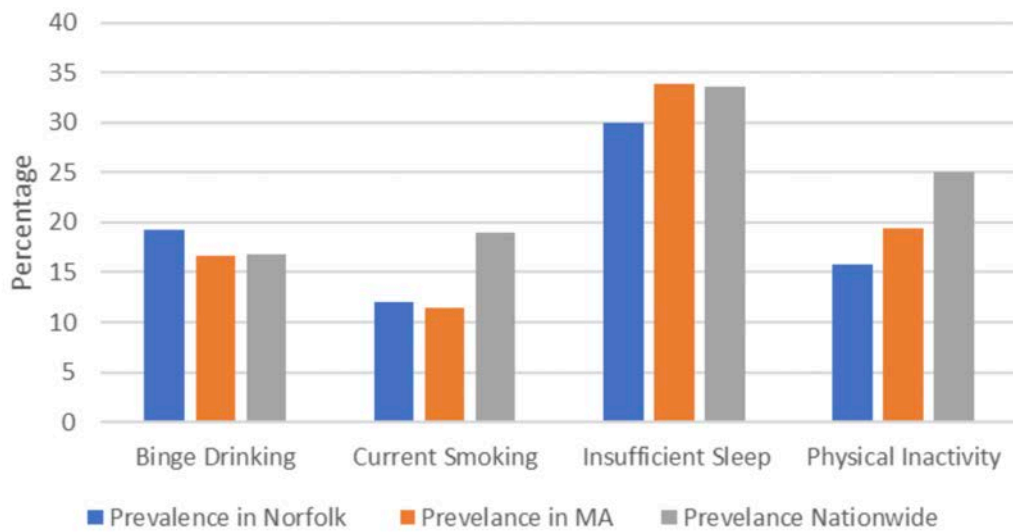
### Health Metrics Data

#### Outcomes

Health metrics indicate that Norfolk residents generally experience healthier outcomes than residents across the Commonwealth. However, the data also shows that rates of cancer, COPD, high cholesterol, and obesity are more prevalent in Norfolk than they are across the state.



## Health Behaviors



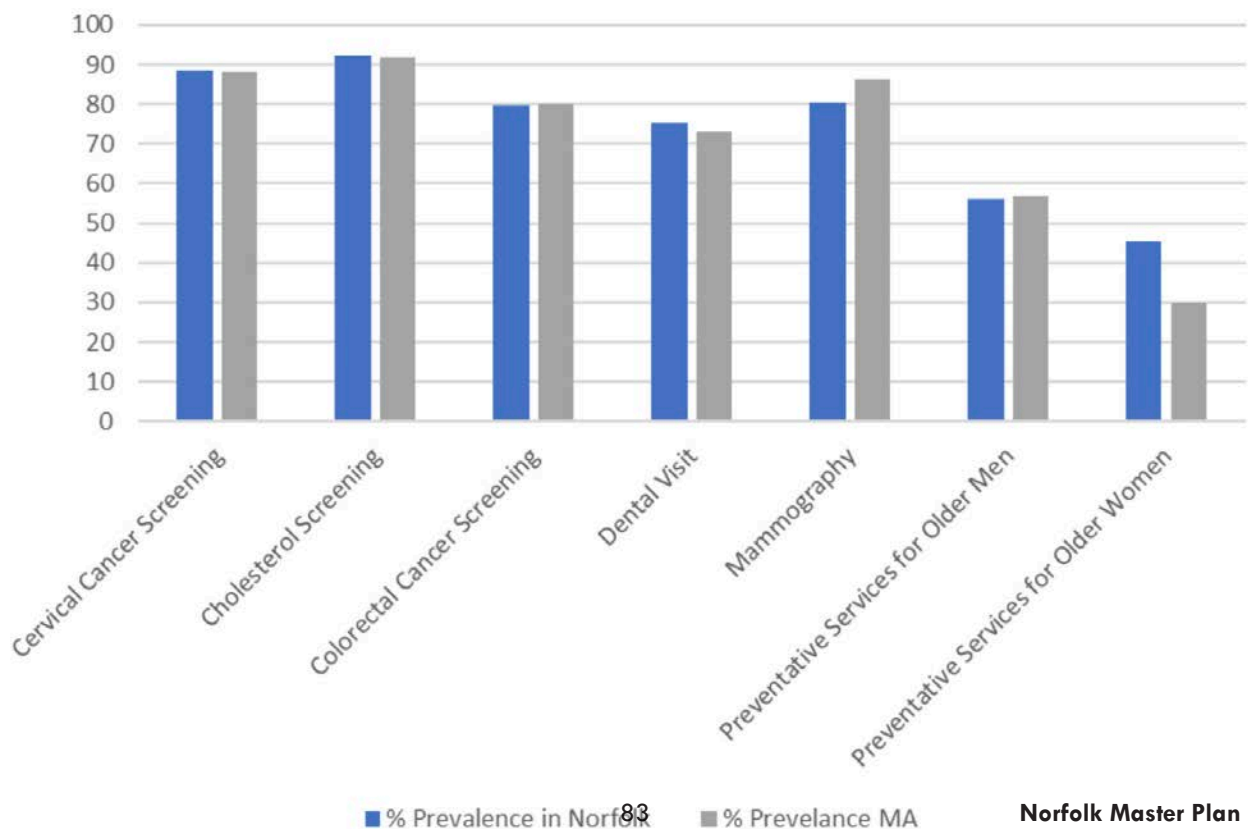
### Behavior

Health data reveals that Norfolk residents partake in risky health behaviors at a slightly higher rate than residents across the Commonwealth. Residents engage in more binge drinking and smoking and less physical activity than residents across the Commonwealth.

### Preventative Health Actions

Norfolk residents participate in preventative screenings and services at a similar rate or better than residents across the Commonwealth. Norfolk slightly lags behind the Commonwealth in terms of preventative services for breast cancer and diseases.

## Health Prevention



## **Older Adults**

Over a quarter (28%) of Norfolk residents are 60 years or older. Older residents of Norfolk fare better on most healthy aging indicators than older residents across the Commonwealth. (MA Healthy Aging Collaborative)

The Norfolk Council on Aging (the Council) serves as a resource for older residents, their families, and caretakers by providing programs and services that enhance their quality of life, promote healthy aging, and foster independence. Programs offered by the Council include activities that promote physical activity, social interaction, and even grocery shopping. Other Things to Consider

## **Other Health Considerations**

### **Social Cohesion**

Social cohesion, which describes the extent of connectedness and solidarity of a community, and social support are associated with positive health outcomes. Communities with greater levels of social cohesion, often characterized by high levels of trust and respect, participation in community activities and public affairs, and increased participation in community groups, have better health outcomes than those with low levels. Norfolk may lack the social infrastructure that encourages interaction and leads to social cohesion. A more connected community with strong social support networks offers individuals social capital or shared group resources such as learning about a job opening from a friend of a friend (Healthy People).

### **Housing**

Housing has major effects on health through multiple pathways including household stability, housing affordability, housing quality and design, and the location and context of the housing. Stable housing is an essential component of good health. Stable housing allows residents to prioritize their health, better manage disease, and invest in their well-being. When housing is unaffordable it can force individuals to choose between housing payments and other essentials such as food, medical care, or utilities. Housing affordability

issues can also contribute to chronic stress which decreases resistance to disease. Children in unstable housing situations are at increased risk of malnutrition and development delays.

There are several measures of housing quality. Poor housing quality includes housing that is not adequately maintained, ventilated, or free from pests and contaminants, such as mold, lead, or radon. These types of housing issues are important contributors to rates of injury, asthma, cancer, neurotoxicity, cardiovascular disease, depression, and poor mental health. A common hazard in many Massachusetts homes, as a result of older housing stock, is lead paint. The use of lead in household paint was banned in 1978, but lead paint applied before the ban is still present in many older homes across the Commonwealth. Disturbed or aging paint can release lead dust, which is then inhaled or consumed.

### **Food Access**

Research suggests that access to healthy and nutritious foods where you live may play a critical role in residents' diets. Over the long term dietary choices are associated with risks for chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food security as the condition of having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Norfolk residents report having to leave the Town to grocery shop and to make routine food purchases.

### **Transportation & Safety**

Transportation is a critical factor that influences people's health and the health of a community. Air pollution associated with traffic congestion and physical inactivity due to passive forms of travel and sitting for hours in traffic have significant long-term impacts on a person's health such as asthma, obesity, heart disease, respiratory disease, neurological as well as increased mortality rates. Near-term health risks such as traffic crashes also present health risks. Investments in sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, public transit, and other infrastructure that supports active travel and physical activity

can result in improvements to individuals' health and decreased health care costs. Seven of the ten most common chronic diseases are favorably influenced by regular physical activity. The U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion recommends adults should do at least 150 minutes to 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity for substantial health benefits. Norfolk residents report the desire for safer walking and biking options in the Town.

### **Environmental Quality**

There is evidence linking exposure to very high noise and traffic-related air pollution to increased risk for heart disease, respiratory disease, and neurological health conditions. Noise annoyance, a condition mentioned by focus group participants, increases the risk for chronic stress. Night-time noise exposure can disturb sleep and can lead to the body's inability to regulate blood pressure. Concentrations of traffic-related air pollution can be particularly high in areas with heavy congestion or high volumes of vehicular traffic. Near these locations, individuals in schools and homes, and those who walk, or bicycle, can be directly affected by short- and long-term exposure to the pollutants. Research suggests that exposure concerns are relevant to those living or actively recreating within 200 meters of corridors that have traffic volumes exceeding 25,000 vehicles per day.

### **Wastewater**

Many households rely on septic tank systems to treat wastewater. If property owners do not maintain septic systems properly, water quality and environmental contamination concerns can arise. Federal and state grants are available for communities, particularly for households with lower incomes, reliant on septic systems for wastewater management to ensure safe environmental conditions. The town does not have any stormwater surge system.

### **Green Space**

Parks and recreational spaces present opportunities for physical activity and community

connections. In studies, good access to large, attractive recreation spaces has been associated with greater levels of exercise. Access to parks, open space, and greenery are associated with protection against poor mental health outcomes and greater socializing and social support.

In addition to the physical, cognitive, and social health co-benefits vegetation, and open green space offer ecological benefits to the community. Vegetation and green spaces can alleviate heat impacts, offer stormwater retention, and improve air quality locally as well as provide carbon sequestration opportunities and regulate temperature regionally.

### **Other Considerations**

The Greater Boston area is vulnerable to climate change impacts, including an increased frequency of extreme weather events. These events may impact community health and community cohesion.



## Topic Brief

# Energy and Sustainability

### Quick Facts

- The Town of Norfolk has achieved a Green Community Designation.
- The Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan was updated in 2023.
- The Town completed a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Resilience Building Report in 2020.

### Key Issues

- The highest priority actions from the Town's MVP Resilience Building Report were:
  - Stormwater system (culverts),
  - Dams,
  - Rural character,
  - Schools and community buildings (emergency centers),
  - Regional public communications center,
  - Mass Audubon (open space),
  - Trees,
  - Flood control,
  - Roadway infrastructure,
  - Public water supply,
  - Electrical infrastructure,
  - Vector borne diseases and invasive species,
  - Streams/Charles River,
  - Soils and hazardous waste sites.

## Introduction

Sustainability has been a key theme of the Norfolk Master Plan process to date. All of the Master Plan topics deal with issues of sustainability and some of the topics more directly address energy issues as well. Due to the distributed nature of this topic, the chapter for Energy and Sustainability is shorter than the others, but important to retain as a distinct repository for sustainability and energy related issues and themes.

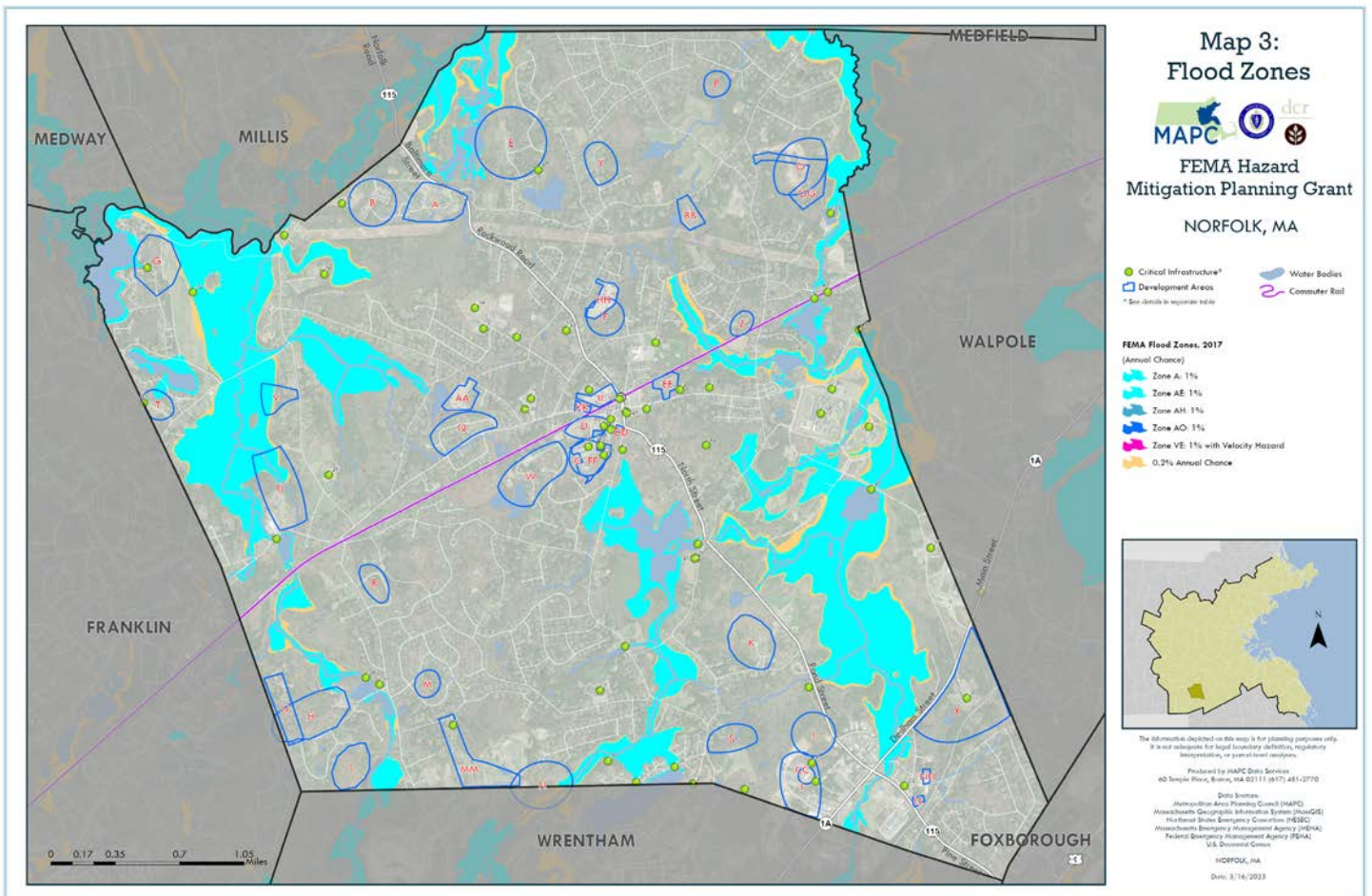
## Integrating the Hazard Mitigation Plan

It is also an important place to feature the Town of Norfolk's Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) Update from 2023. The HMP states that flooding is the most likely natural hazard to impact the Town. Other concerns are the impacts of extreme heat, drought, brushfires, and nor'easters. The plan considers how the changing climate will affect these natural hazards. Such as, warming

temperatures that will fuel changing precipitation patterns and an increasing frequency and intensity of severe storms.

The figure below highlights the location of flood zones, critical infrastructure, and development areas in the Town.

In the HMP it was stated that the hazard mitigation strategy outlined in that report will be incorporated into the Master Plan. As such it is important to highlight the HMP strategy here. The HMP identified a number of mitigation measures that would help reduce the Town's vulnerability to natural hazards. Overall, the hazard mitigation strategy recognizes that mitigating hazards for Norfolk will be an ongoing process as an understanding of natural hazards and the steps that can be taken to mitigate their damages changes over time. Global climate change and



a variety of other factors will impact the Town's vulnerability in the future, and local officials will need to work together across departments and municipalities, and collaborate with state and federal agencies in order to understand and address these changes.

Specific mitigation measures identified in the HMP that could be advanced through the Master Plan goals and strategies include the protection of open space, and the identification of land for acquisition and protection. The HMP states the Town has acquired land since 2010 and will be identifying land protection options. The Town's OSRP is also due for an update in 2024 and the Town is convening an open space committee to guide that work.

Another specific mitigation measure identified in the HMP is revisions to development bylaws and regulations. Some of this work has been completed, but it is ongoing. The Town updated its bylaw for the flood district based on the model from FEMA and DCR. The stormwater management bylaw was also updated in 2021. The Town will also need to adopt an updated floodplain bylaw to reflect FEMA's RiskMap update by 2024. Another specific suggestion is to evaluate the need to amend the Town's existing scenic tree by-law.

Another specific mitigation measure is incorporating climate change in Town plans and operations going forward. Each of the topic areas in the Master Plan consider climate change impacts.

## **Integrating the MVP Summary of Findings**

Participants in the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Community Resilience Program Workshops had similar priorities as participants in the Master Plan process identifying the rural character of Norfolk as a key asset. Many participants thought that the rural character of Norfolk, with significant open space, recreational facilities and protected land was a strength. Maintaining open space maintains pervious surfaces helping to reduce the

risks of flooding while promoting infiltration and replenishment of groundwater supplies. This is a strength that can be protected through Bylaws, regulations and implementation of open space and master planning. If protections are not considered, then this strength will erode.

The following action items were identified and can be integrated with the Master Plan:

- **Stormwater System:** As projections indicate a significant increase in rainfall intensity and duration, the ability of the existing stormwater system to handle storm events will only worsen. The discussion included the need to complete a condition assessment of all culverts, enact an Operation and Maintenance program, and evaluate the possibility of creating a stormwater utility.
- **Tree Maintenance Program:** During high wind or heavy snowstorm events, downed trees and branches cause major maintenance problems in Town. Tree trimming is extremely important preventative maintenance which the Town would like to encourage power companies to continue to keep up with, as many of these trees are not maintained by the Town. The tree program would also address related concerns regarding tree-affecting diseases which cause more downed trees and limbs. The Town will have to evaluate by-law limitations due to Town road being classified as "Scenic Roadways".
- **Dams:** Both groups identified dams as a vulnerable asset. Norfolk is home to several dams which could become vulnerable to the effects of global warming. The discussion revolved around completing a study to evaluate the condition and overall necessity of the dams and whether they were needed or could be decommissioned.
- **Emergency Shelter Provisions:** During a severe storm event there is a likelihood that Norfolk residents may be displaced from their homes for a period of time. Both groups discussed



the importance of having Town buildings (schools, community buildings etc.) capable of sheltering displaced residents. If existing buildings currently do not have the capacity to shelter residents they should be equipped with the appropriate facilities and equipment necessary to do so.

The high priority actions identified by the MVP Community Resilience Program include:

- Stormwater System (Culverts): Condition Assessment, Identify/survey culverts that need upgrades, Continue Operation and Maintenance Plan Development, evaluate creation of a stormwater utility
- Dams: Condition assessment and evaluate the possibility of decommissioning existing dams
- Rural Character: Implementation of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) to maintain the rural character of Norfolk
- Schools and Community Buildings (Emergency Centers): Bolster schools and emergency centers with to incorporate sanitation aspects (i.e. showers) to allow for long term occupancy of displaced residents
- Regional Public Communications Center: Maintain as “first class”. Incorporate more towns to be part of the existing center
- Mass Audubon (Open Space): Continue funding for grant opportunities to keep in current condition
- Trees: Develop a more aggressive preventative maintenance plan. Identify priority locations and develop a removal/replacement program. Evaluate the need to amend the Town’s existing scenic tree by-law
- Flood Control: Complete an audit of equipment for flooding issues. Acquire additional pumps as required
- Roadway Infrastructure: Create an Emergency access/detour plant
- Public Water Supply: Education and Community outreach. Strict enforcement of water use restrictions. Pursue new well locations. Restrict private well usage
- Electrical Infrastructure: Initiate a tree clearing program. Upgrade lightning protection systems and backup power systems
- Vector Borne Diseases and Invasive Species: Continue monitoring of invasive species for reporting. Public outreach program for education
- Streams/Charles River: Replace culverts where required. Complete a hydraulic study of the Charles River (flood model)
- Soils and Hazardous Waste Sites: Develop an inventory of contaminated sites evaluate possible remedies and redevelopment options to existing contaminated sites



## Summary

# Draft Vision Statement

### Process

The process to define and update the Town's Draft Vision Statement has been a step-by-step effort to build on past plans, bring forward continuity of relevant ideals, and introduce new ideas based on the current context and community concerns.

The foundation for the Vision Statement is the Vision Statement that was part of the 2007 Norfolk Master Plan. This Vision Statement was projecting out 10 years to 2017. While progress has been made in moving the Town toward the vision, the overall framework and focus remains relevant.

Updated community concerns and ambitions were discussed in a series of Community Meetings hosted between April and June of 2023. A community-wide online survey was also used to gather additional feedback from April through July of 2023. Over 1,000 residents participated in the survey and events. The feedback received identifies clear themes for an updated vision statement. This feedback is summarized below and was used to edit and amend the foundation of the 2007 Master Plan Vision Statement.

All of the Vision Statement language was then reframed to define aspirational solutions. The aspirational solutions attempt to translate the expressed desires of the Town into more inspirational language that can help to direct future activities to make the most effective progress toward the Town's vision.

### 2007 Master Plan Vision Statement

The process began with the 2007 Master Plan Vision Statement. For that Town-wide Master Plan the Vision Statement was as follows:

"Norfolk's citizens would like . . .

- 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.
- To preserve its residential, semi-rural, New England character with roadway images of farms, forests, ponds and streams.
- 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.
- Ensure that its resources are sufficient to sustain the future needs of residents and businesses."

### 2023 Community Feedback

Four key questions set the context for the vision and identified the key challenges, the attractive features, the greatest assets of the Town, and how close the Town is to participants' ideal vision.

The Community Survey asked "What do you see as the top 3 challenges facing Norfolk?" Participants responded that the top 3 challenges

are “managing growth and change” (51% of responses/509 people), “attracting new investment and development” (41%/411), and “expanding Town amenities” (36%/361).

At the three community workshops, participants were asked to identify issues the Town is facing. The most frequently repeated themes were issues related to commercial growth in the Town (57 mentions), issues related to taxes and municipal finances of the Town (47 mentions), issues related to growth management in the Town (41 mentions), issues related to Town services (38 mentions), and issues related to transportation options in the Town (38 mentions).

The Community Survey asked “What originally attracted you to live in Norfolk?” Participants responded that the “small town and semi-rural feel” (51% of responses/515 people), “quality schools and family-orientation” (43%/427), and the “quality of housing and neighborhoods” (36%/361).

At the three community workshops, participants were asked what are common activities that you do in Norfolk and what activities to you need to leave the Town to do. The most frequent responses for activities in Norfolk included sports and recreation, food but not groceries, pharmacy, and personal services. The most frequent responses for activities that need to be done outside of Norfolk included grocery stores, restaurants and bakeries, sports and recreation, medical services, and entertainment and shopping.

The Community Survey asked “What are the greatest assets of Norfolk?” Participants responded “homes and neighborhoods” (44% of responses/441 people), “schools” (40%/401) and “sense of community and neighbors” (40%/400).

At the three community workshops, participants were asked to identify asset of the Town. The most frequently repeated themes for assets included Norfolk’s rural, small-town feel (44 mentions), the Town services (43 mentions), community events (41 mentions), recreation (17 mentions), and

transportation options (11 mentions).

The Community Survey asked “How close is Norfolk today to your ideal vision for the Town?” Participants responded “close” (34% of responses/242 people), “neutral” (33%/234), and “not close” (24%/173) followed by a distant “very close” (4%/30) and “really not close” (4%/31).

At the three community workshops, participants were asked to rank and compare how well Norfolk is doing across six themes including accessibility, affordability, connection to history, community health, comparison to its ideal vision, and being welcoming. For each theme participants responded on a spectrum from “ideal” to “not close” with “could be better” at the center. All themes clustered around “could be better.” The most favorable ranking was given to Norfolk being a welcoming community. The next most favorable were Norfolk’s comparison to its ideal vision and the perception of its overall community health. The Town’s connection to its history was the last theme at the center of the spectrum. The Town’s accessibility and affordability both moved down the scale toward “not close” with affordability being the least favorable of all themes.

## 2023 Vision Statement Updates

A list of additional desired outcomes was created based on the community feedback for the current Master Plan with a focus on the ideals where clear consensus emerged across the series of community meeting exercises and community survey responses.

In addition to the foundation set forth in the 2007 Vision Statement language:

Norfolk's citizens would like to . . .

- Manage growth so that future changes thoughtfully respond to community needs.
- Approach community facilities and services with a focus on long term sustainability and fiscal responsibility.
- Enhance quality of life by continuing to improve school facilities, recreation facilities, and natural resource and open space amenities.
- Strengthen safe and convenient options for getting around Town by walking or biking.
- Support a range of housing options in the Town to allow residents to stay in Norfolk for all stages of life.
- Address environmental and infrastructure investments to provide future generations a Town that is more resilient with a cleaner environment.
- Continue to support public safety and reliable emergency services.
- Leverage the Commuter Rail service and strengthen accessibility to the Town Center.

## Aspirational Solutions

This list of updated desired outcomes was combined with the foundation of the previous Vision Statement and translated into a series of more aspirational solutions that composed updated Vision Statement language for the Town. The list of aspirational solutions is drafted as:

- A Town Center that is the center of Town life.
- Preservation of the visual character and communal aspects of small-town life.
- Defining and attracting the types of services and amenities desired.
- Placing the Town in better position for the next generation.
- Clearly defining what is desired in each area of the Town and be patient working toward those outcomes.
- Planning for the long term with Town investments and maintenance of Town assets.
- Planning and creating a connected network of open space and Town facilities and amenities.
- Planning and creating a secondary Town-wide walking and biking network.
- Encouraging and creating housing options for all life stages to attract and keep residents.
- Developing plans to address legacy concerns with infrastructure and the environment.
- Build a community where all members contribute to safety and community health.
- Improve connections to and use of the train station as a central community feature.

## Draft Vision Statement

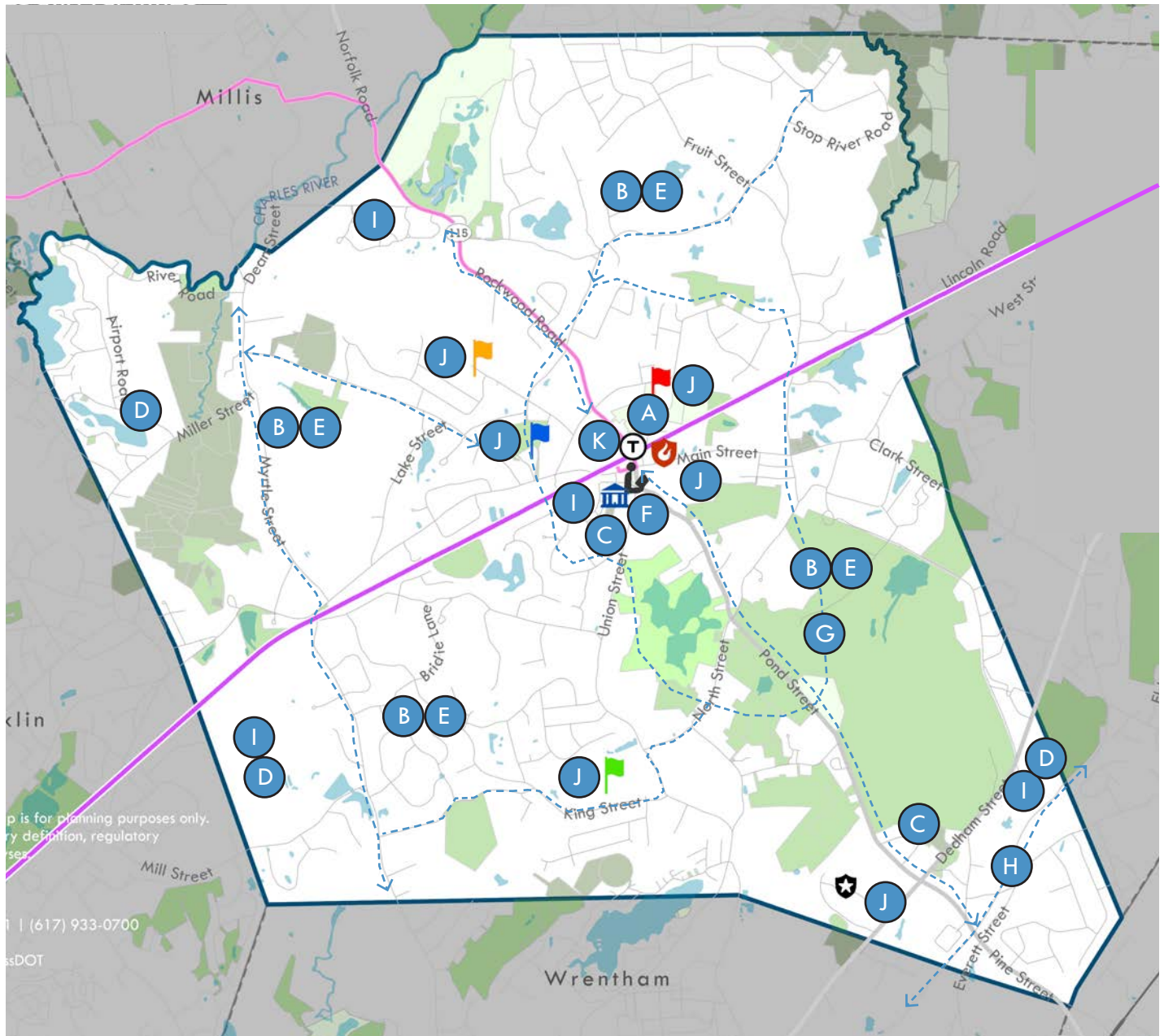
The updated Vision Statement was composed as a narrative update to the 2007 Master Plan Vision Statement and composed as a new Town-wide illustrative Vision Statement Concept Diagram to help spatialize and provide context to the Vision Statement language.

## Norfolk's citizens would like . . .

- A • A Town Center that is the center of Town life.
- B • A Town that preserves its semi-rural and village character and communal aspects of small-town life.
- C • A Town that defines and attracts the types of services and amenities desired by residents.
- D • To place the Town in a better position for the next generation.
- E • To clearly define what is desired in each area of the Town and to be patient working toward those outcomes.
- F • To plan for the long term with Town investments in sustainable services and infrastructure and the legacy of investments for the next generation.
- G • To plan and create a connected network of open space and Town facilities.
- H • To plan and create a secondary Town-wide walking and biking network.
- I • To create opportunities for housing options for all life stages to attract and keep residents.
- J • To support a community where all members contribute to safety and community health.
- K • To improve connections to and use of the train station as a central community feature.

## Draft Vision Diagram

In addition to the narrative Vision Statement, it is helpful to project where these ideas may occur geographically in the Town. This helps to show the focus of the Vision Statement and ensure an equitable distribution of attention across the Town. It also helps to make the narrative statements more tangible. The letters on the diagram correspond with the letters in the narrative Vision Statement.



## Draft Principles

The community engagement process also revealed a set of principles which were frequently referenced by community members across a variety of contexts and conversations. These principles help to further define the Town's vision and provide a framework to guide future decisions.

The following principles are intended to guide decision making and may be particularly helpful for future decisions not directly contemplated by the Master Plan. The principles are intended to provide a guiding framework for making decisions that would be consistent with the direction defined by the community through the Master Plan.

- **Quality of Life** – advancing decisions that will strengthen the well being of Norfolk residents and increase quality of life.
- **Fiscal responsibility** – balancing short term needs, quality long-term investments, and the tax burden of residents.
- **Sustainability** – the long-term ability to support a process over time with economic, environment, and social considerations.
- **Transparency** – sharing open and clear information for decision making processes with instructions for involvement.
- **Equity** – considering the perspectives of those who may not have a voice at the table or that will be most impacted by the decisions.
- **Municipal collaboration** – considering the most efficient and effective ways to share resources with neighboring towns.

## Select Board Principles

The principles are complementary to the Town of Norfolk Select Board Principles. The Select Board, on behalf of the Town of Norfolk, holds that the following principles inform the Town's approach to governance and municipal services. These guiding principles embody the Town's highest aspirations for the delivery of services within the Town and inform our annual goals and objectives.

- **Collaboration** – We believe in working collaboratively to address community needs, solve problems, and provide direction for the Town's future equitably.
- **Efficient** – We believe in ensuring that government work is done as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.
- **Excellence** – We believe in striving for excellence and providing the highest quality of services possible to ensure the community's safety, education, and well-being.
- **Diversity** – We believe that diversity makes Norfolk a stronger organization and a more welcome place.
- **Innovation** – We believe in exploring ways to be innovative to provide better services.
- **Transparency** – We believe in transparency and working inclusively to ensure that we are responsive and provide transparent governance.



## Summary

# Community Feedback

### Engagement Events

The initial phase of the Norfolk Master Plan included a series of engagement activities to spread awareness of the Master Plan in Town and gather input from a range of stakeholders. These engagement activities started in January 2023 and continued through June 2023, with Norfolk Town Day on June 10, 2023 marking a final milestone for this phase of engagement. Throughout the process, we estimate having heard from 1,100 individuals through a forum, three workshops, tabling at Town events, and a survey.

We kicked off the engagement with an Awareness Campaign, which featured physical and digital materials to spread awareness of the Norfolk Master Plan among residents. Outreach methods included social media posts across Town channels, including the Town Facebook group with approximately 4,400 members, physical flyers distributed by the Town and Master Plan Steering Committee members, press releases, and more.

The Awareness Campaign also contributed to spreading the word about the first Norfolk Master Plan Visioning Forum on April 25. The Visioning Forum was hosted at the Freeman Kennedy School and was an in-person only meeting. The MAPC team presented an overview of the Master Plan and led interactive discussion activities to identify residents' concerns, challenges, hopes, and vision for the Town. Approximately 30 residents attended the first Forum.

The Visioning Forum was followed by a series of workshops, designed to target priority populations within the Norfolk community. The three workshops were:

- May 24, 2023: A virtual workshop for parents and caregivers (Estimated attendance: 20 participants)
- June 5, 2023: A hybrid workshop for seniors at River's Edge (Estimated attendance: 40 participants)
- June 26, 2023: An in-person workshop with local business owners, hosted by the Norfolk Small Business Association (Estimated attendance: 9 business owners)

Each of these workshops included an overview of the Master Plan and interactive discussion activities tailored to the target audience. The activities for each of these engagement events were designed to gather input on concerns they had about Norfolk, what they do in Town or look for elsewhere, where they thought the Town was across various factors, and Norfolk's strengths and assets.

Throughout the first phase of the Master Plan, the team took advantage of opportunities to "pop-up" at popular Town events and festivals. This allowed the team to meet people where they are, especially those who may not have time, interest, or capacity to attend a scheduled meeting like parents and youth. The team developed business



cards about the Master Plan to pass out and interactive activities that fit a festival or tabling context. The team tabled or popped-up at the following events:

- April 29, 2023: Norfolk Baseball opening day – passed out business cards to encourage Norfolk residents to take the Master Plan Survey
- May 17, 2023: Town Meeting – passed out business cards, paper surveys, and let attendees know of opportunities to engage with the Master Plan
- June 10, 2023: Norfolk Community Day – held a table at the Lions’ annual Community Day event

Lastly, the Master Plan team distributed a survey that reached 1,001 respondents. The survey was open from the initial Visioning Forum on April 25 to July 1, 2023. The survey was available in both digital and paper forms, with 964 online submissions and 36 paper copies

## Feedback Summary

Throughout this first phase of the engagement process, participants were invited to provide input on what concerns and challenges they saw for the Town, as well as their vision and hopes for Norfolk’s future. From those conversations, information-gathering activities, and open-ended survey responses, the following themes have emerged.

### Development

Participants shared a range of opinions on development. Some expressed concerns about the impact of development on the environment, traffic, school enrollment, and other Town resources. These respondents value the small-town or rural character of the Town. Others want to see an increase in the Town’s housing stock, including more affordable housing options. A shared concern among engagement event participants and survey respondents was an interest in creating more affordable options for seniors and young families.

As one respondent put it, “Our children who we raised in Norfolk but can not afford, housing costs are outrageous! They have had to move to different towns, it is a shame.”

### Economic Development

Norfolk residents are eager to have more retail options available to them, especially in Town Center. Many engagement event participants and 26 survey respondents referenced interest in a grocery store, with grocery store chains like Brother’s and Wegmans mentioned as examples of what would be desirable. Additionally, many residents expressed a desire for more restaurants and cafes, as well as smaller retail options like a florist or bookstore. One survey respondent suggested that Norfolk faces a “lack of sustainable town center businesses to promote social activities. Examples are Wrentham Center, Medfield Center and Wellesley Center.” Multiple respondents suggested that a more vibrant and robust retail economy may help relieve pressure from the residential tax base.

Survey respondents, in particular, suggested process improvements to support the development of retail in the Town. One resident emphasized the need to support businesses to improve the appearance of storefronts. Others suggested that the Town should do more to support local businesses, whether through infrastructure improvements (i.e., sewer) or illuminating processes for small business. As one respondent put it, “I feel as though in the past the town has made it so difficult for businesses to work with that they’ve just gone to neighboring communities to avoid the headache. We need to stop placing roadblocks in the way of business.”

### Transportation

Survey respondents provided a wealth of input on transportation challenges and highlights in Norfolk. While a handful (6 respondents) noted that they thought there were “no real transportation issues,” many others mentioned concerns like safety, walkability, sidewalks, and access to public transportation.

There were 16 mentions of safety related to transportation. Most highlighted concerns about the speed of cars and commercial trucks driving through Town. Many respondents suggested signaling improvements to address this issue, including the installation of traffic lights. Specifically, 3 respondents requested the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of Seekonk and Needham streets. Others mentioned the need for roadway signage to be updated for visibility.

Others suggested the need for more sidewalks, with 26 mentions of sidewalks in the open-ended responses. Respondents were especially interested in more sidewalks around the schools and on Main Street. They suggested that more sidewalks would be beneficial to improving individual health, public safety, and connectivity to economic development. One respondent summed it up well: “Since moving here I went from walking three miles a day to less than one. I wish I could push my stroller up Seekonk to Cilla’s but the roads are crazy. I would spend so much more time and money across town if I could safely bike or walk with my kids from my house.” A few respondents specifically expressed interest in seeing more trails to enable exercise for mental health, staying active, and minimizing the carbon footprint from driving. In particular, one respondent suggested adopting the MassInMotion program.

There was overwhelming response about the commuter rail – approximately 40 respondents mentioned it in their responses, with 27 listing it as one of the reasons they were attracted to live in Norfolk. Some respondents who saw the commuter rail as a transportation challenge for the Town mentioned the need for more frequent train schedules and increased resident parking at the MBTA lot. A few respondents mentioned the need for bus service in Town—while they may not be as visible a part of the population, some Norfolk residents cannot drive. One respondent said, “Medical facilities are out of town and there is no bus for people who no longer drive.”

## **Taxes and Municipal Finance**

While this did not come up in the Workshops, many survey respondents and a few Forum participants identified the desire to reduce the residential tax burden. Some identified attracting business to Norfolk as an approach to relieving the tax burden on individuals. Many of these respondents specifically mentioned the negative impact of the tax load on seniors, who may be on fixed incomes.

## **Recreation**

Many survey participants mentioned the Town’s recreation facilities as a strength (more than 13 mentions across the forum and workshops), with Pond Street Fields mentioned in particular as an asset to the Town. Specifically, the recreational programming was lauded for being extensive, but also competitive to sign up for with limited spots. Suggestions were offered for programming that span all age groups, from more spots for youth to teenagers to seniors. Participants shared ideas for additional recreational programming spaces, such as pools, turn fields, pickleball courts, and playgrounds. Some also suggested maintenance or improvement to existing recreational facilities, such as adding restrooms or trails to connect the recreational spaces or provide passive recreational opportunities (walking, biking).

## **Small-town, Rural Character**

Participants who mentioned Norfolk’s small-town feel or rural character universally see it as a positive trait. Many expressed appreciation that the Town has active farms. Others like the balance between feeling like a New England small town, while having access to mid-sized Towns like Franklin. When asked what attracted them to live in Norfolk, many survey respondents noted that proximity to family—whether children, siblings, or other family—was a top factor.

## **Town Services**

Participants appreciate many of the services the Town provides. The library was lauded as a great resource, with some participants advocating for expansion of the programming. Others mentioned the senior center and its similarly great programming, with many participants in

the Seniors workshop asking for an expansion. Additionally, the Fire Department, Police Department, and Transfer Station were mentioned as assets to the Town. However, many participants noted the littering occurring in Town and suggested municipal waste pickup as a service the Town could add. Another frequently mentioned issue was that Town communications is lacking—it is difficult for people to find out what is going on and services provided in Town, especially for those who are not online or in the private Town Facebook group.

### **Land Use & Zoning**

Participants identified both specific sites where land use or zoning may pose concerns, as well as issues related to Town Infrastructure that impact land use. Participants supported the B1 zoning district and enjoy Town Green, but identified areas that they would like to see redeveloped, like the Southwood site and Stop & Shop property. Many respondents mentioned the Town’s sewer and water as a barrier to development and the condition and maintenance of roads as main issue areas.

### **Historic & Cultural Resources**

Survey respondents focused on the recorded history of the Town, while Forum and Workshop participants focused on cultural resources and programming. Multiple survey respondents noted the historical narrative of the Town exists, but may require better dissemination. Forum and workshop participants offered examples of Norfolk’s cultural assets, like Town Day, activities like the Summer Concert Series on Town Hill, Lions Club, the Grange, and more. However, one Forum participant noted that “People are (were) invested in helping the community, but the pandemic caused more isolated living.”

### **Gaps in Participation**

Groups that have been underrepresented in the process to date:

- Renters
- Residents of color
- People who work in Norfolk
- Residents w/lower incomes
- People under the age of 35

It is important to note there are few renters or people of color in Norfolk. The Master Plan Steering Committee should continue to reach these audiences, but it is likely to be continue to be challenging since these groups do not comprise large shares of Norfolk’s current population.



# **NORFOLK**

## **Master Plan 2035**

**Topic Briefing and  
Geographic Summaries**