

LAND USE

BACKGROUND

Westwood's land use pattern is fully established, with three-quarters of the Town's 7,155 acre land area now committed through development or preservation measures.

Reflecting this, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council categorizes Westwood as an "established suburb" a classification whose general characteristics include:

- Lower density suburbs; owner-occupied single family homes on 3/4 - 1 acre lots
- Approaching buildout; limited amounts of vacant land (<20% of land area is vacant & developable)
- New growth: teardowns, small-scale greenfield development, some redevelopment
- Population is stable or growing moderately

Significantly, as noted by the planning agency, these characteristics will influence a community's development over the coming decades. Since most of the land is either developed or protected from development, any significant growth is possible largely through intensification of existing uses or development of unprotected open land.

The Town's existing pattern of land use is the product of historical factors and past policy decisions. Like many surrounding towns, Westwood was originally a part of the Town of Dedham and, in fact, was the last town to break away in 1897. At the time, the area that became Westwood was mostly outlying farms and a few mills alongside streams. After the turn of the century, Westwood experienced a migration of wealthy families from the city who purchased the large farms in the northern and eastern portions of the towns for seasonal or year-round homes. Around the same time street railways were built along High and Washington Streets which gave rise to small-scale commercial development along the routes and attracted newcomers to settle in town. Following World War I the automobile displaced the railways and the town experienced its first wave of residential subdivisions in the areas of Nahatan/Pond streets, north of Buckmaster Pond, and Windsor/Hampton roads. A second larger wave of suburbanization began after World War II and continued for decades. A 1949 rezoning of property nearby the Route 128 railroad station for light industrial and business uses eventually yielded the Westwood Industrial Park in the 1960s.

This history is imprinted on today's land use pattern. Commercial development, civic institutions, and higher density residential development cluster along the radial corridors of High and Washington streets, and land along Route 1 and the Providence commuter rail line support regional-scale business. The early estate areas still exhibit the lowest residential densities and largest tracts of undeveloped land, and the densities of the remaining predominantly single-family residential neighborhoods reflect the zoning policies in place at the time they were developed. This pattern serves the Town well, so there is strong support for its continuation.

Policies, regulatory changes and public investments recommended by the 2000 Plan and implemented in subsequent years respect and reinforce this pattern while addressing needs identified in the Plan. Zoning Bylaw changes designed to stimulate private investment in the Town's commercial areas have been successful in revitalizing the University Avenue area and the commercial center along Washington Street, creating a mix of new commercial space, diversified housing, public amenities, and significant new tax revenue. The size, scope, appearance and type of business activities, as well as compatibility with residential uses are essential considerations for proposed redevelopment in the town centers.

WESTWOOD LAND USE, 2019

Land Use Type	Acres	Percentage
Commercial	211	2.9
Community	235	3.3
Industrial	85	1.2
Mixed Use	136	1.9
Open Space	1,283	17.9
Residential Single Family	3,947	55.2
Residential Two Family	37	0.5
Residential 3+ Units	209	2.9
ROW	663	9.3
Vacant	318	4.4
TOTAL	7,155	100

Source: land use figures and percentages were calculated using Town GIS and the Westwood, MA Online Assessment Database for Fiscal Year 2019. The full parcel is counted towards only one specific land use.

Building Permits for new housing units by year

Year	New Single Family housing units	New Single family housing units replacing existing house	2-family	Apartments	Condominiums
2000	22	*			
2001	18				
2002	15				
2003	21				
2004	10				
2005	12				
2006	20				
2007	1	9			
2008	6	7			
2009	3	9			
2010	9	3			
2011	7	13			

2012	4	6	2(4)		
2013	15	11		6	
2014	12	15	2(4)	350	
2015	12	19			
2016	6	14			
2017	10	10	1	12	
2018	19	15	1		100
2019					40

*Data for new vs. replacement housing units was not broken out in the data source for the years 2000-2006.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Topics that have dominated land use concerns throughout this planning effort include: community character, especially the town centers; preservation of natural resources and open space, expanding housing options, community cohesion, and fiscal stability.

Some elements of protecting community character are obvious, such as managing the nature and appearance of the High Street, and Islington commercial districts; and protecting the Sandy Valley/Purgatory Brook and Noanet corridors. The character of the Town also depends upon social and economic qualities that land use may affect. For example, it is important to the character of the Town that present residents will still find appropriate housing here as they age, and that their children will have opportunities to live here as well. As the table of building permits reveals, a significant number of the new single-family houses built are on properties where an existing house was replaced, i.e., 56 percent of new single-family houses are a result of teardowns. From 2007-2018, 131 out of a total of 235 building permits for new single-family houses replaced an existing home. As these new homes are generally larger than those they replaced (and are often on nonconforming lots) this trend has the potential to both impact neighborhood character and reduce the more moderately priced housing stock.

Every natural feature in the Town not already protected by ownership or control is at risk for development. Protection can be gained by open space acquisition, through use of conservation restrictions, and by shaping development to provide protection as it occurs, such as through Open Space Residential Development. The 2000 Plan set as a modest objective preserving an average of 35 acres per year over the subsequent decade bringing protected open land to 1,600 or more acres, and likely resulting in an approximately stable population. Between 2000 and 2018, the Westwood Land Trust preserved an average of almost 20 acres per year by securing conservation restrictions on private property. Another 25 acres were preserved through conditions of approval on residential development projects.

Fiscal stability requires continuing to support economic development, and doing so in ways that are not damaging to the basic residential qualities of the community. In 2019 commercial properties represented 16 percent of the Town's assessed valuations and 27 percent of total property taxes paid. The Town should continue to grow the commercial tax base to at least maintain this level of contribution from the commercial sector.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

The major land use patterns of the Town are essentially committed by existing use and infrastructure patterns and reinforced by land use policies and regulations. Requiring additional attention, however, are the smaller-scale characteristics of development: not just what gets

developed or how much gets developed, but also the qualities of that development, and how those smaller-scale characteristics reflect the preferences and interests of the Town. These actions are critical to success.

- Further strengthen the design and quality of the pedestrian oriented Villages, increase connectivity within the town through pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and microtransit alternatives, and maintain the sound character of other areas of the Town, whether business or suburban.
- Continue to guide residential development planning, so that residential development is shaped to also protect open space, serve diverse social needs, respect resource protection, and have visual compatibility with the character of Westwood.
- Continue to apply approaches that achieve increased business development consistent with the overall objective of protecting residential quality of life.
- Aggressively seek to protect key open space resources through acquisition, conservation restrictions, and regulatory protection.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

The order these actions are listed is not meant to signify priority.

General:

- L1. Foster a greater sense of community by connecting Westwood's commercial centers, schools and other institutions, open space resources and recreation facilities through new or improved walking paths, bike paths, trails and shuttle services.
- L2. Support legislation to reform the state's zoning, planning and permitting laws to provide the town with additional tools to pursue local objectives and better plan for the future.
- L3. As opportunities arise, re-purpose municipally-owned property to advance the town center, housing, and/or open space and recreation goals of this plan.

To promote quality of residential development and diversity of housing opportunities:

- L4. Continue to prioritize use of flexible density-based residential controls with performance-based incentives, such as contained in the Open Space Residential Development provisions and flexible mixed use overlay district provisions of the zoning bylaw, giving the Town a stronger voice in siting, environmental protection, and housing choice.
- L5. Conduct a review of approved OSRD projects to explore whether or not the process and/or outcomes could be improved through revisions to the relevant regulatory provisions.
- L6. Continue to promote further diversifying housing opportunities such as through allowing "cottage communities," small lot elderly housing, 2- and 3-family homes, small-scale multi-family housing, accessory dwelling units, and through offering incentives for developments that serve those needs.
- L7. Explore incentives and regulatory provisions to preserve and expand stock of starter homes/moderately priced housing.

To support viable, sustainable, and compatible business development:

- L8. Strengthen the town's civic/commercial centers by promoting pedestrian-friendly, compact, mixed use redevelopment, coherent community-oriented design, and featuring social gathering spaces.

- L9. Work with commercial property owners in the town centers to continually upgrade properties to maintain and attract local retail, restaurants and services serving the community.
- L10 Develop design guidelines and incorporate a design-review process into the regulatory review of mixed-use or commercial development in the town's commercial districts.
- L11. Explore how best to foster mixed-use redevelopment in the Glacier/Everett Business District area, encouraging a rich but compatible integration of office uses, industrial uses, retail uses, and residential uses.

To protect key resources:

- L10. As part of the Town's long range financial planning process, include a commitment of regular support-for open space acquisition and protection.
- L11. Continue to identify open space, scenic, cultural and natural features that are of special significance to the community and develop criteria for setting priorities for acquisition or protection.

RESOURCES

Westwood Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2019.
Fenerty, Marjory R. 1972. West Dedham and Westwood: 300 Years.
Westwood Annual Town Reports, 2000-2018.
Existing Land Use Map, Draft 12-03-2019