

5 | economic development and the town center

| Goal | Policies for Decision Makers |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Enhance existing commercial areas.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage economic growth and support local independent businesses. • Develop a proactive approach to business retention and recruitment. • Improve the function and design of the town’s commercial districts. • Maximize the potential of small commercial areas while mitigating impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods. |
| <p>Create mixed-use environments in the town’s commercial areas.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage redevelopment and new development projects that contain first-floor retail and upper-story office or residential uses. |
| <p>Maintain and enhance the town center’s character.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that redevelopment preserves the design and scale of the town center. • Improve walkability by creating safe and pleasant pedestrian and bicycle connections to other parts of the town. |
| <p>Attract new customers to the town center and other commercial areas.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the business mix by recruiting restaurants and other businesses that bring more nighttime activity. • Encourage owners to expand business hours. • Enhance joint marketing activities. • Manage parking in the town center. • Promote special events and programming in the town center. |
| <p>Encourage the operation of home-based businesses.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider zoning changes that will support home businesses while protecting neighborhood character. |

Findings

- Winchester residents are highly-educated and many are employed in well-paying jobs in professional services, health care, and finance.
- Fewer than one job per resident exists in Winchester, and approximately 18% of employed town residents worked in Winchester in 2000.
- Health care and professional services account for the majority of the town's economic activity.
- Winchester's town center has a diverse mix of local and chain retail and is a successful and attractive business district.
- Winchester has few vacant properties available for new commercial or industrial development.
- Commercial and industrial properties paid less than 5% of the town's property tax revenues in FY 2007.

Key Challenges

- Maintaining and enhancing the success of the town center.
- Increasing the commercial tax base with a limited amount of land available for development.
- Improving the appearance of the North Main Street commercial districts.
- Developing public-private partnerships to construct well-designed mixed-use projects that provide higher-density housing and additional retail and services.
- Providing additional Town staff and funding for economic development activities.



Fells Hardware, a family-owned business on Main Street.



Neighborhood commercial center on North Washington Street.



Industrial property on Cross Street.



FACT SHEET

economic profile

EMPLOYMENT OF WINCHESTER RESIDENTS

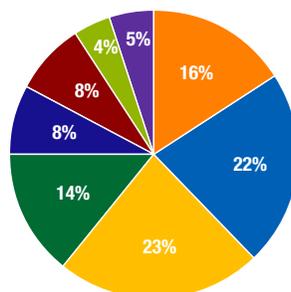
- May 2007 labor force: 10,956
- May 2007 unemployment rate: 3.87% (Massachusetts rate: 5.1%)
- Highest unemployment rate, 1997-2007: 4.4% in 2003

WORKER CHARACTERISTICS (2000)

- 66% of the population over 15 was in the labor force
- Over 44% of female residents over 15 and 22% of male residents over 15 were not in the labor force
- Both spouses worked in 55% of married-couple families
- Almost two thirds of Winchester residents worked in professional or management jobs in 2000 and 21% worked in sales or office jobs
- 5.9% of workers worked at home
- 10% of workers were self-employed in an unincorporated business
- Over 82% of residents were employed outside of the Town of Winchester in 2000. The majority of these residents worked in Boston or its northern suburbs.

Resident Occupations, 2000

- Professional, Management, and Scientific
- Educational, Health, and Social Services
- Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate
- Manufacturing
- Retail
- Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation, and Food Services
- Information
- Other



BUSINESSES AND WAGES (2005)

- 691 employers in Winchester
- 8,139 jobs in Winchester
- 41.2% of jobs in health care
- 8.6% of jobs in retail and wholesale
- 8.5% of jobs in construction
- 5% of jobs in professional and technical services
- 3.5% of jobs in real estate
- 2005 average annual wage for Winchester jobs: \$43,368

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Winchester has more workers in the labor force than it has jobs and most Winchester residents work elsewhere in the Greater Boston area.
- Almost two-thirds of Winchester's residents work in professional, financial, educational, or health care jobs. These jobs generally are in high-wage sectors.
- Winchester has a lower unemployment rate than the state of Massachusetts.
- Winchester's financial status is strong compared to other Massachusetts municipalities, as can be seen from its high Moody's bond rating.
- As an affluent community, Winchester can afford high-quality municipal services, but the demand for services and other expenses are rising faster than available revenues.
- Almost 2/3 of town expenditures go to public schools and employee benefits.
- The Town depends upon residential property tax revenues to a large degree and has limited taxable commercial or industrial property.

FACT SHEET (continued)

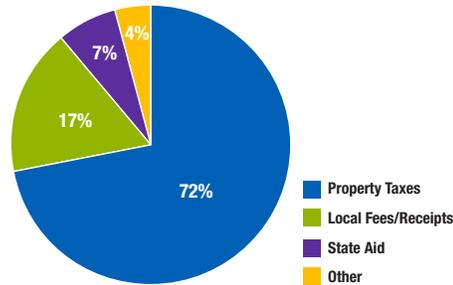
MAJOR EMPLOYERS (2006)

- Winchester Hospital: 2,000 jobs
- Winchester Health Care Management: 1,500 jobs
- Winchester School District: 350 jobs
- Town of Winchester: 250 jobs
- Mahoney's: 200 jobs

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

- Winchester is one of only thirteen Massachusetts municipalities that has a Moody's bond rating of Aaa, the highest rating possible

Revenue Sources for FY 2006



TOWN EXPENDITURES (FY 2006)

- 41% on education
- 22% on employee benefits
- 11% on public safety
- 10% on public works
- 16% on other items

TAXES

- 95% of property taxes are paid by residential property owners
- In 2006, the average single family tax bill was \$7,580—the 14th-highest in Massachusetts
- Tax rates on residential and commercial properties declined from, respectively, 13.82 and 12.92 in 2000 to 10.42 and 9.69 in 2006
- The tax levy on residential property increased by 3.6% for FY 2007
- The tax levy on commercial property increased by 3.7% for FY 2007
- Commercial/Industrial/Personal Property (C/I/P) declined from 7% of the assessed value in FY 2000 to 5.5% in FY 2003 and less than 5% in FY 2007 due to faster growth in the value of residential property.

FY 2006 Tax Classification

| TAX CLASSIFICATION | ASSESSED VALUES | 2006 % VALUATION | 2000 % VALUATION | 2006 TAX LEVY |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Residential | \$5,040,440,045 | 95 | 93.1 | \$52,067,746 |
| Commercial | \$202,345,683 | 3.8 | 5.1 | \$1,950,612 |
| Industrial | \$23,405,900 | 0.4 | 0.8 | \$225,633 |
| Open Space | \$0 | 0 | 0 | \$0 |
| Personal Property | \$38,728,990 | 0.7 | 1.1 | \$373,347 |
| TOTAL | \$5,304,920,618 | | | \$54,617,338 |

Sources: Town of Winchester, Census 2000, Massachusetts Department of Revenue, and Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training Services

A. Current Conditions

Winchester is a residential suburb with an attractive and active town center that contains the town’s major commercial uses. A diverse mix of retail and offices thrives in Winchester’s traditional “downtown,” but the town has additional commercial and industrial properties located along North Main Street and Cross Street in what once was a successful business area centered around the railroad and the Aberjona River. Other small commercial areas include the intersection of Swanton and Washington streets and the Mahoney’s area along Route 3/Cambridge Street.

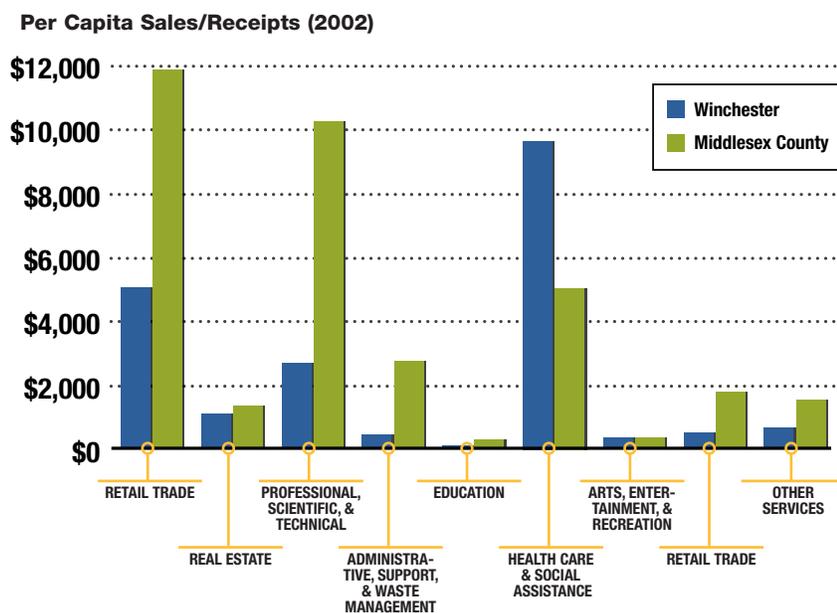
Winchester’s tax base is 95% residential, and its primary economic development goals involve retaining existing businesses and recruiting new ones. However, since the community is close to build-out, almost no undeveloped sites remain for new commercial or industrial development. The Town’s economic development activities will have to include consideration of potential redevelopment sites to encourage new growth and build its non-residential tax base.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN WINCHESTER

Unlike many of its neighbors, Winchester has few major commercial attractions and an economy driven mainly by health care and professional services. Winchester is a residential town, and the businesses and industry located there tend to be small and localized. The town’s relatively small commercial and industrial activity is the product of a series of choices made by generations of residents to limit the amount of non-residential properties in order to preserve Winchester’s affluent residential character.

Health care services in Winchester include Winchester Hospital, residential facilities, and medical offices. According to the 2002 Economic Census compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau, this leading economic sector generated over \$203 million in sales/receipts in 2002. In the same year, Winchester’s sales/receipts per capita for medical services totaled

\$9,645, in comparison to \$4,890 for Middlesex County and \$6,007 for the state as a whole. However, with the exception of the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector, Winchester trailed both the county and the state in sales/receipts per capita for all other industry sectors. Professional/scientific/technical services comprise Winchester’s second major economic sector, with architectural and engineering services generating over one-third of sector revenues. Other important professional services include computer services, legal services, consulting, design, and accounting.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau’s 2002 Economic Census

The relative absence of shopping centers and larger office and manufacturing buildings in Winchester limits commercial and industrial revenues. Although the retail sector brought in over \$106 million in sales/receipts in 2002, with food/beverage sales accounting for 28% of retail revenues, retail sales per capita were almost 60% lower than both county and state totals. Similarly, professional/scientific/technical services sales/receipts per capita were over 70% lower than county totals and almost 60% lower than state totals. The 2002 Economic Census did not collect data for manufacturing sectors on the town and county levels, but Winchester does not contain any large manufacturing operations.

EMPLOYMENT OF WINCHESTER RESIDENTS

Winchester’s labor force is highly-educated and typically works in higher-paying jobs in the Greater Boston area. Residents are employed in three main sectors: professional, scientific, and management services; educational, health, and social services; and finance, insurance and real estate.

In 2000, almost two thirds of Winchester residents worked in professional or management jobs, and another 21% worked in sales or office jobs. Many of these jobs were located outside of Winchester in Boston and other northern suburban communities, including Cambridge, Woburn, and Burlington.

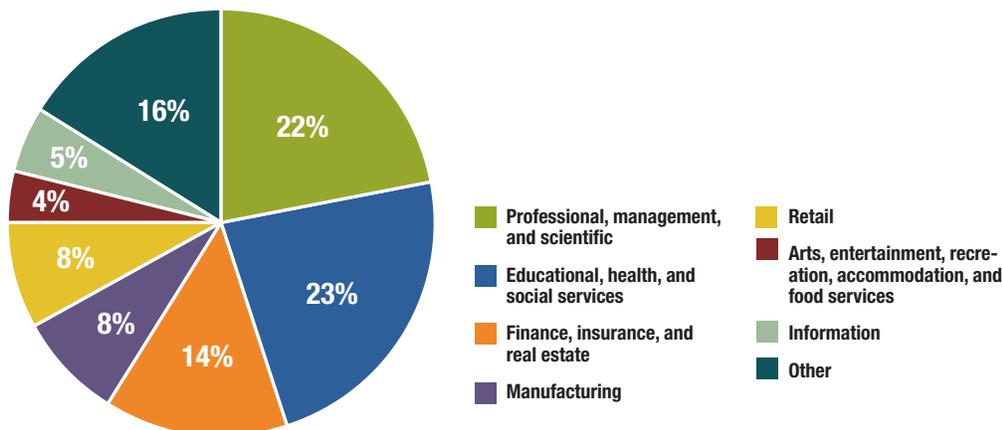
Higher-income jobs and high educational levels tend to correlate with low unemployment rates, and the unemployment rate of Winchester residents is much lower than that of all state or Middlesex County residents.

Table 1. Top 10 Locations Where Winchester Residents Worked (2000)

| CITY/TOWN | NUMBER | PERCENTAGE OF WORKING RESIDENTS |
|------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| Boston | 2,646 | 26.29% |
| Winchester | 1,804 | 17.92% |
| Cambridge | 800 | 7.95% |
| Woburn | 580 | 5.70% |
| Burlington | 382 | 3.79% |
| Medford | 306 | 3.04% |
| Lexington | 237 | 2.35% |
| Somerville | 219 | 2.18% |
| Waltham | 186 | 1.85% |
| Bedford | 167 | 1.66% |

Source: Census 2000

Resident Occupations in Winchester (2000)



Source: Census 2000

Table 2. Unemployment Rates

| AREA | 2000 | 2002 | 2004 | 2006 | JUNE 2007 |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|-----------|
| Winchester | 2.1% | 4.3% | 3.8% | 3.5% | 3.8% |
| Middlesex County | 2.2% | 5.3% | 4.5% | 4.1% | 4.3% |
| Massachusetts | 2.7% | 5.6% | 5.4% | 5.2% | 4.9% |

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue

As in other communities, Winchester's residents have been affected by business cycles and the unemployment rate has increased since 2000. Unemployment among Winchester residents peaked in 2003, when the rate rose to 4.4% (in comparison to 5.3% for Middlesex County and 5.7% for Massachusetts as a whole).

BUSINESSES AND JOBS IN WINCHESTER

Although residential in character, Winchester is home to almost 700 businesses employing over 8,000 workers. Most of these jobs are located in small commercial or industrial establishments, but in 2000, over 5.9% of Winchester workers reported that they worked in a home business. Fewer than one job exists for every Winchester resident in the labor force, and the majority of these jobs are in health care, construction, and the retail trade. The town's major employers in 2006 included Winchester Hospital (2,000 jobs), Winchester Health Care Management (1,500 jobs), the Winchester School District (350 jobs), the Town of Winchester (250 jobs), and Mahoney's (200 jobs).

Table 3. Businesses and Jobs in Winchester (2005)

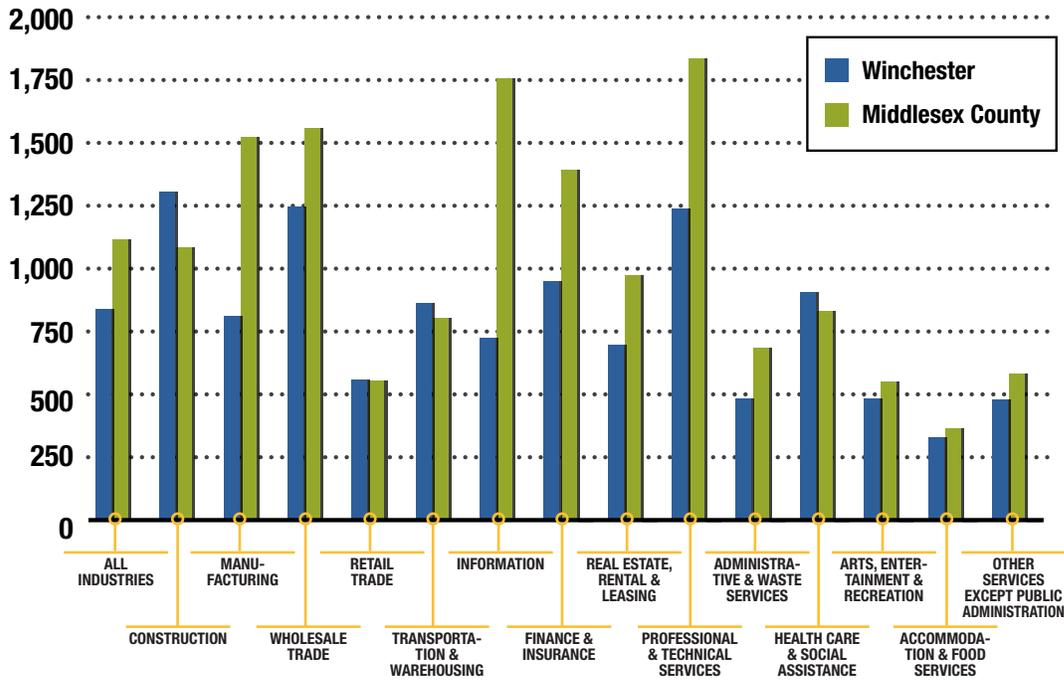
| INDUSTRY SECTOR | NUMBER OF BUSINESSES | AVERAGE NUMBER OF JOBS | AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Construction | 55 | 695 | \$1,297 |
| Manufacturing | 13 | 165 | \$808 |
| Wholesale Trade | 25 | 97 | \$1,236 |
| Retail Trade | 54 | 605 | \$557 |
| Transportation and Warehousing | 6 | 149 | \$857 |
| Information | 11 | 84 | \$719 |
| Finance and Insurance | 40 | 312 | \$944 |
| Real Estate, Rental, and Leasing | 34 | 288 | \$692 |
| Professional and Technical Services | 138 | 419 | \$1,228 |
| Administrative and Waste Services | 30 | 365 | \$483 |
| Educational Services | 8 | 93 | \$689 |
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 75 | 3,350 | \$902 |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation | 16 | 209 | \$481 |
| Accommodation and Food Services | 27 | 208 | \$332 |
| Other Services, except Public Administration | 153 | 352 | \$477 |
| Other | 6 | 748 | Not available |
| TOTAL | 691 | 8,139 | \$834 |

Source: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development

Like those in many other residential suburbs, Winchester's jobs typically are lower-wage service or retail employment. In the fourth quarter of 2006, Winchester had approximately 567 service-producing employers. With the exception of construction, retail, and health care, Winchester's jobs tend to pay less than comparable jobs in the area. Many individuals who work in Winchester cannot afford to own or rent a home in town, as the average annual wage of a worker employed in Winchester in 2007 was only \$43,368.

As part of the MetroFuture project (2005-2006), the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) produced population and employment projections that assume the continuation of current trends in the Greater Boston area. Winchester is included in this dataset, although the 2000 baseline number of jobs is smaller than the number found in the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development statistics. According

Resident Occupations in Winchester (2000)



Source: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development

to the MAPC, Winchester will gain approximately 200 jobs between 2000 and 2010 and 160 jobs in the next decade for a total of 7,724 jobs in 2020. State data also reflect job growth in Winchester since 2000, but 2005 data show that over 8,000 jobs already exist in the town. MAPC data project a much slower rate of growth than already has occurred since 2000, so the accuracy of the MetroFuture projections can be questioned. A straight-line projection made using the state data’s annual job growth rate for Winchester (0.7%) shows that the town will have over 8,400 jobs by 2010 and just over 9,000 jobs by 2020.

NON-RESIDENTIAL LAND USES

Over 25% of Winchester’s total land area is zoned for non-residential uses, but commercial and industrial zoning districts comprise only 2.6% of all town parcels. According to 2006 data on land use from the Town Assessor’s Office, over 62 acres are occupied by commercial uses, 59% of which are retail, storage/warehousing, and auto sales businesses located in the town center and along the North Main Street corridor. More than 24 acres contain industrial uses, and most of these parcels are located in the Cross Street area. Winchester also has a small number of mixed-use parcels which include commercial and residential uses and cover 24 acres. These properties are located mainly along Church Street near the town center and on North Main and Swanton streets.

Winchester has a very limited area for commercial and industrial development. In addition to the properties already developed for non-residential uses, the town includes only one parcel identified as “potentially developable” for industrial uses (along Pond Street)

Table 4. Winchester Non-Residential Land Uses (2006)

| | NUMBER OF PARCELS | ACREAGE | % OF TOWN LAND AREA |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| COMMERCIAL | | | |
| Retail | 37 | 14.4 | 0.4 |
| Storage/Warehouse/Distribution | 18 | 10.3 | 0.3 |
| Restaurant | 2 | 1.2 | 0.03 |
| Auto Services | 16 | 12.2 | 0.3 |
| Day Care | 2 | 1 | 0.03 |
| Parking Lot | 9 | 4 | 0.1 |
| Other | 3 | 4.6 | 0.1 |
| TOTAL COMMERCIAL | 87 | 47.7 | 1.3 |
| OFFICE | | | |
| General Office | 25 | 10.2 | 0.3 |
| Medical Office | 4 | 1.6 | 0.04 |
| Bank | 6 | 2.7 | 0.07 |
| Other | 68 | 0 | — |
| TOTAL OFFICE | 103 | 14.5 | 0.4 |
| INDUSTRIAL | | | |
| Manufacturing Operations | 6 | 6 | 0.2 |
| Manufacturing Warehouse | 5 | 12.6 | 0.3 |
| Manufacturing Office | 2 | 3.8 | 0.1 |
| Other | 3 | 2 | 0.05 |
| TOTAL INDUSTRIAL | 16 | 24.4 | 0.6 |
| MIXED USE | | | |
| Primarily Residential; Secondary Commercial | 9 | 2.1 | 0.06 |
| Primarily Commercial; Secondary Residential | 17 | 3.2 | 0.09 |
| Primarily Residential; Secondary Agricultural | 1 | 18.7 | 0.5 |
| TOTAL MIXED USE | 27 | 24.0 | 0.6 |

Source: Town of Winchester Assessor's Data (2006)

and eight parcels identified as “developable” for commercial uses. These parcels are very small, ranging in size from 0.09 acres to 0.43 acres. The majority of these potential commercial and industrial parcels are located along North Main Street near the Woburn line and off Main Street in the town center.

Winchester’s almost-built out condition offers few opportunities for major new commercial and industrial development on vacant parcels. Established residential neighborhoods preclude the creation of large new retail centers like those found just across the town line on Route 3 in Woburn, and the town center area has no sites for large office or retail uses. Economic development in the form of new businesses will have to be achieved through redevelopment of sites in or near existing commercial areas and could require land assembly for viable sites. Similarly, industrial expansion will be confined to redevelopment of properties in the traditional industrial area along Cross Street and limited to small industrial operations, given the size of parcels in this area and the lack of easy, direct access to Interstate 93.

BUSINESS PROPERTY AND TAXES

Winchester’s non-residential property accounts for only a small portion of the Town’s annual property tax revenues. In FY 2000, commercial and industrial property accounted for only 5.8% of ad valorem taxes; by FY 2007, this

number had decreased to 4.3%. The total assessed value of commercial and industrial property increased by more than 32% during this period. The decreased percentage of total valuation primarily reflects the fact that residential values increased at a higher rate than non-residential values during the housing market boom of the early 2000s. From FY 2000 to FY 2007, residential assessed values in Winchester increased by 106%, more than three times faster than commercial and industrial values. Now that home sales are slowing and housing prices are falling, the rate of increase in the value of residential properties has diminished.

Winchester’s low non-residential assessed value percentage (C/I/P %) does not differ substantially from that of similar residential suburbs, such as Belmont and Arlington. It is low, however, when compared to a community like Wellesley, which has an important



Table 5. Winchester Total Assessed Value, FY 2003–FY 2007

| YEAR | RESIDENTIAL VALUE | COMMERCIAL VALUE | INDUSTRIAL VALUE | PERSONAL PROPERTY VALUE | TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE | COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL % OF TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE | COMMERCIAL/ INDUSTRIAL/ PERSONAL PROPERTY (C/I/P) % OF TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE |
|---------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FY 2003 | \$3,904,312,184 | \$166,798,422 | \$25,996,700 | \$33,356,000 | \$4,130,472,306 | 4.66 | 5.48 |
| FY 2004 | \$4,054,507,318 | \$170,415,348 | \$26,213,300 | \$36,680,300 | \$4,287,816,266 | 4.58 | 5.44 |
| FY 2005 | \$4,607,480,711 | \$187,655,157 | \$23,016,300 | \$36,031,090 | \$4,854,183,258 | 4.33 | 5.08 |
| FY 2006 | \$4,844,612,396 | \$194,071,332 | \$22,993,100 | \$37,790,250 | \$5,099,467,078 | 4.26 | 5.00 |
| FY 2007 | \$5,040,440,045 | \$202,345,683 | \$23,405,900 | \$38,728,990 | \$5,304,920,618 | 4.26 | 4.99 |

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue

TABLE 6. NON-RESIDENTIAL ASSESSED VALUE, FY 2007

| TOWN/CITY | NON-RESIDENTIAL ASSESSED VALUE AS % OF TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Winchester | 4.99 |
| Belmont | 5.24 |
| Arlington | 5.37 |
| Stoneham | 10.57 |
| Medford | 10.77 |
| Wellesley | 11.13 |
| Lexington | 11.46 |
| Woburn | 27.00 |

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue

office center on Route 128, or Woburn, which has large commercial properties along Route 3 and off I-93 and Route 128.

Under state law, a town or city may tax residential and non-residential properties at different rates. Municipalities usually exercise this option in order to shift some of the residential tax burden to commercial and industrial properties. Most cities and towns that have

non-residential tax bases under 20% do not use this option, but several of Winchester’s neighbors, including Lexington, Woburn, Burlington, Medford, Stoneham, and Melrose, have implemented a split rate system that taxes residential properties at a lower rate than non-residential ones. Winchester has not adopted a split rate, although in FY 2007, Winchester’s tax rate for non-residential properties was 9.64 and 10.33 per \$1,000 for residential properties. This difference can be accounted for by M.G.L. Chapter 59, §21(c), which allows communities to shift recovery of water and sewer costs from user fees to the property tax levy. Therefore, when water and sewer debt service costs are subtracted from the 10.33 residential tax rate, the residential tax rate in FY 2007 effectively was 9.64 per \$1,000 of assessed value. Commercial and industrial properties paid less than 3% of the total tax levy for FY 2007.

B. Economic Development Groups

WINCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Winchester Chamber of Commerce has over 200 members and provides support to Winchester’s business community. The Chamber sponsors programs and marketing events to help small business owners, including the very successful Women Helping Women program and Midnight Madness, and also provides monthly networking opportunities for its members. Chamber members regularly attend meetings of Town boards and committees and meet with the Town Manager in order to provide effective advocacy

for the town's business interests. Key Chamber concerns include parking issues in the town center, retaining the uniform tax rate for commercial and residential properties, improving signage regulations, attracting new businesses, and increasing foot traffic in the town center.

TOWN OF WINCHESTER

Unlike the neighboring towns of Lexington and Medford, Winchester has no economic development staff to work with the Chamber of Commerce and local business owners. The Town had a part-time economic development staff member in the past, but this position was not renewed. The Chamber of Commerce currently works with the Board of Selectmen and the Town Manager's office on economic development issues.

C. Commercial Areas

TOWN CENTER

Winchester has a compact, successful town center that serves as a major town destination. Although they constitute only a small portion of Winchester's land area, the commercial parcels in the town center are an integral part of the community and help create Winchester's unique identity. Many of the town center properties contain independent, locally-owned businesses that combine with regional and national chain stores, such as CVS/Pharmacy and Starbucks, to provide a diverse shopping experience. The sense of a traditional village center is enhanced by streetscape improvements made in the 1980s, aesthetic harmony created by complementary architectural styles and form, and the area's scale, which promotes walkability.

At the public meetings held in the early stages of the Comprehensive Master Plan, residents spoke repeatedly of the town center's importance to the community and over-



Town Hall and Mill Pond contribute to the town center's village-like identity.

whelmingly identified it as one of Winchester's most important assets that should be protected. According to some workshop participants, the town center functions as the heart of the community, as it contains retail and services, commuter rail access to Boston, government and educational facilities, the Town Common, and natural areas along the Aberjona River. The town center is where Winchester residents of all ages come together regularly—not just for special events—and Winchester recognizes the importance of supporting and enhancing a true civic center.

Winchester residents also value the town center for its beauty and its collection of locally-owned businesses. Residents and visitors alike gravitate toward the town center because it includes specialty retail—such as small clothing boutiques, toy stores, and independent bookstores—that offers options beyond generic national chain stores found in other communities. The town center also includes the Griffin Museum of Photography, a unique cultural offering on Shore Road that attracts residents and out-of-town visitors.

The town center’s architecture of one- to three-story brick buildings and stone churches, tree-lined streets, green open spaces, and water features such as the Mill Pond and the waterfall provide reminders of Winchester’s prosperous history and create a distinct sense of place.

When residents speak of economic development in Winchester, one of their major goals involves maintaining the town center’s vibrancy by supporting local business owners and encouraging diversification of the business mix. Residents would like to see more “after 5:00” uses, particularly restaurants, and more cultural events that draw users to the town center.



The Town center's walkable nature helps attract a variety of users.

Although the town center has a strong appeal and regularly attracts many users, it faces several issues that hamper its success. Parking is a major concern, and participants in all of the public meetings reported that a shortage of parking spaces in the town center reduces their number of visits to this community center. Although on-street town center parking is free, one workshop participant stated that he would rather drive to Woburn, where he knows he could find a parking space at a large retail center, instead of taking a chance on finding a parking space in the town center. Others spoke of parking problems at the commuter rail station and adjacent areas because residents living a few blocks away will drive and park in the lot, and other commuters park in spaces that normally serve retail businesses or offices. The Chamber of Commerce also believes that parking enforcement is a problem, particularly along Shore Road, in the Town Hall lot, and in the Waterfield lot at the commuter rail station. Although some of the perceived problem stems from individuals being unwilling to walk more than a block or two from their cars or homes, it is clear that parking is an economic development issue in Winchester. If residents stay away from the town center because they feel that parking is inadequate, the area’s businesses lose revenues and the town center loses some of its power to attract new businesses. This has been an ongoing issue since the 1980s, and at one point, the Town secured an Off-Street Parking Grant from the state to construct a parking structure in the parking lot adjacent to the town center commuter rail station. Town Meeting, however, declined to accept this grant and it was returned to the state. The commuter rail parking lot remains a potential location for a parking structure that could help mitigate some of the town center’s parking issues.

Parking improvements could help address another town center business concern identified by the Chamber of Commerce: the need to increase foot traffic. Winchester’s town center is highly walkable, with sidewalks and short blocks shaded by trees, and a mixture of government functions, retail, churches, banks, and small offices that allows patrons to fulfill a variety of needs with one town center trip. The town center also is convenient to nearby schools and neighborhoods. A walk in the town center on a pleasant weekday afternoon reveals a variety of users: junior-high and high-school students, young moth-

ers with children, Winchester office workers, commuter rail users, and senior residents. However, merchants would like to see more daily foot traffic, because it is difficult for town center businesses to compete with merchants in larger retail centers, such as Woburn's strip shopping centers and the Burlington Mall. The lack of "after 5:00" activities also eliminates potential evening business, as residents go to nearby communities to eat dinner and shop. In the Comprehensive Master Plan public meetings, business community representatives identified the need to increase recruiting efforts for new businesses and improve programming as ways to achieve the goal of increasing town center foot traffic.

Adding residential units to the town center as a means of increasing foot traffic also has been discussed for several years. One method of achieving this could be by adding one or more stories to one-story "taxpayer" retail buildings. Some residents have looked upon this favorably, especially since the type of residential units created probably would not attract families with children that would increase the financial burden on the school system, but a real estate and market analysis suggests that this may not be the best option because of the potential disruption to existing businesses. Adding a second floor to a one-story building is difficult without partial or complete demolition, and during construction, tenants would have to be relocated. Rents in the town center are good and few buildings are underutilized, so demolition and redevelopment of existing buildings could diminish landlord and business profitability. This analysis suggests that redevelopment of specific larger parcels into residential units, smaller office space, and some ground-floor retail may be a more viable solution. Potential redevelopment sites include the former Winchester Laundry property, the commuter rail parking lot, and Town-owned properties along Winchester Place that currently house the fire and police stations and associated parking.

NORTH MAIN STREET

Although the town center functions as Winchester's most concentrated commercial district, other commercial areas exist, primarily along North Main Street to the Woburn line. The mile-long corridor is zoned as a general business district (under three different zoning categories) and contains a mixture of retail, office, and residential uses. Winchester's



North Main Street streetscape

fast-food restaurants are located here, along with service stations, convenience stores, hair salons, a veterinary clinic, banks, small retail stores, and the town's largest office building. The line of commercial uses is not continuous; it is divided into at least three smaller nodes separated by residences: 1) just north of Skillings Road; 2) around Swanton Street; and 3) near Cross Street. These nodes are part of the Village Center Overlay Zoning District, which is intended to provide pedestrian-oriented retail centers as redevelopment occurs. All of these districts currently share an auto orientation and contain numerous curb cuts and, in some cases, sidewalks interrupted by business parking.

A common area problem identified by Comprehensive Master Plan workshop participants is the corridor’s appearance, defined by a jumble of uses, lack of trees, minimal landscaping, prominent commercial signage, parking areas in front of businesses, and “Anywhere, USA” generic building types. Although a few businesses have rehabilitated late nineteenth-century residences for commercial uses, most of the businesses along North Main Street lack architectural character, as many of them are simply national corporate models or standardized commercial buildings. The corridor does have some traditional commercial buildings that are over 50 years old, but few offer any sense of Winchester’s unique community identity.

Compounding the unattractiveness is the amount of traffic that passes along the corridor. North Main Street is Route 38, an arterial route to Woburn that is the most heavily-traveled road in Winchester. In 2002, MassHighway traffic counts for North Main Street above Lake Street recorded 18,800 vehicles per day on this route. The Swanton Street and Cross Street intersections frequently are congested and pose hazards to pedestrians. The majority of North Main Street business patrons arrive at their destinations by car. Unlike in the town center, commercial parking on North Main Street is ample and specific for individual businesses, which means that many parking lots have excess spaces throughout the business day.

SKILLINGS ROAD AND NORTH MAIN STREET

Situated at the northern edge of the town center, the intersection of Skillings Road and North Main Street contains office uses, a small restaurant, and retail, along with the town’s only supermarket, a 38,000 square-foot Stop ‘n’ Shop. Several vacant buildings (formerly commercial) are located across Skillings Road from the supermarket, and an asphalted triangular median area in front of these buildings has been converted into a parking lot. This is a major commercial intersection because of the supermarket, one of the smaller, older ones in the Stop ‘n’ Shop chain.



The intersection of Skillings Road and North Main Street

Although the site lies less than ¼ mile from the middle of the town center, it has few strong connections to the business in the retail core. Commercial uses line Main Street from the central town center to the Stop ‘n’ Shop, but these businesses generally do not continue the unique character of the town center. Instead, the corridor is populated by several gas stations, an office building, condominiums, and a large three-story bank. Closer to the town center, however, the corridor includes one of the town’s older family-owned businesses, Fells True Value Hardware, which has been in operation since 1947.

Given the area’s proximity to the town’s central commercial district and its location at the junction of two important roads, the Stop ‘n’ Shop property can be viewed as a gateway to the town center area. The change in topography as one approaches this intersection from the north also heightens the sense of a gateway area. Although Wedge Pond lies to the southwest of this intersection, its open space has little connection to the commercial area. Like North Main Street, cars dominate this commercial node and few trees and landscaped elements are present. Foot traffic is rare. As a gateway to Winchester’s most important commercial and civic area, this intersection lacks distinction and fails to maximize its prime economic location.



Cambridge Street at Mahoney’s

CAMBRIDGE STREET/ROUTE 3

Although Cambridge Street is a major north-south route through Winchester, it has remained primarily residential. There are, however, a few commercial uses north of the Wildwood Street intersection. Mahoney’s, a family-owned horticultural business renowned throughout the Greater Boston area, has over 17 acres of nursery and sales property along the western side of Cambridge Street almost up to the Woburn line. Other, newer businesses include a 1.3-acre convenience store and gas station constructed in 2005 at the southeastern corner of Cambridge Street and Pond Street and a 7.3-acre property

occupied by Bonnell Ford, an auto dealership. Unlike many businesses in the town center and North Main Street commercial areas, Mahoney’s and Bonnell Ford serve as regional attractors. Their products are unique merchandise, and their location along a major north-south arterial draws customers from neighboring towns. According to data from the Town Assessor’s office, no new parcels are available in this area for additional commercial development.

D. Industrial Areas

Winchester has one industrial cluster located along Cross, River, East, and Holton streets near the rail line and the Aberjona River. These businesses are remnants of a thriving nineteenth- and early-twentieth century industrial district that included tanneries, shoe manufacturing, felt manufacturing, and some worker housing. Although this industrial area declined by 1930, owing to a combination of national and regional economic shifts

and a town movement to reduce unsightly industrial uses, late twentieth-century transportation patterns also helped isolate the area. The industrial area's location shows its origins in a different century, when businesses depended on water and rail transportation to send their goods to market. As truck transportation emerged as the mode of choice in the early and mid-twentieth century, the location of Winchester's industrial area proved less advantageous. The construction of I-93 in the early 1960s made the industrial area further obsolete, as Winchester had no interstate exit and no direct arterial access to the new highway.

Today, the Cross Street area is composed of a collection of small parcels containing industrial buildings and larger parcels with adjunct commercial uses. Parcels identified in the Town Assessor's database as industrial range in size from 0.32 acres to 6.60 acres. Several have contiguous parcels containing manufacturing-related office buildings,



Several industrial properties on Cross Street are for sale or lease.

warehouses, and parking areas (identified in the database as commercial uses). In 2007, many of these industrial and commercial parcels stood vacant, displaying "For Rent" or "For Sale" signs. One major parcel in this area, the 7.5-acre Marotta property, remains undeveloped, but questions exist about its ability to support development due to environmental contamination, poor access, and flooding from the Aberjona River. The area also includes a federal property, the Winchester Engineering and Analytical Center, a laboratory facility

that performs highly-specialized tests for radioactive contamination for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Although the FDA announced plans in July 2007 to close this facility, these plans were temporarily suspended in August 2007, due in part to the unique role that the Winchester lab plays in radiation analysis and contamination testing for the FDA.

E. Recommendations

GOAL: ENHANCE EXISTING COMMERCIAL AREAS.

- ▶ Provide additional Town capacity for economic development activities.

Action

Explore contracting for economic development services or creating a part-time economic development specialist position.

Increased Town support of Winchester's business community will require specialized skills. The Town planner position currently is a part-time position with an array of

responsibilities that affords little time for economic development activities. An economic development specialist is needed to work with the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses on business attraction and retention, grant writing, and marketing programs to help the Town meet its economic development goals. The Town could obtain these services by contracting with a private provider or by creating a part-time economic development staff position.

► **Create a diverse mix of businesses in Winchester's commercial and industrial areas.**



Winchester should focus on recruiting diverse businesses and retaining existing ones.

Actions

Work with the Chamber of Commerce to develop a business recruitment and retention plan.

Winchester residents recognize that sustaining existing businesses and attracting new ones benefits the town's tax base and adds to the value of existing commercial and industrial districts. Ensuring a mix of diverse goods and services in the town center and other areas makes Winchester more attractive as a business destination for residents and visitors alike. The Town's new economic development specialist should work with the Winchester Chamber of Commerce to develop a recruitment and retention plan that will include market studies and identify key types of businesses that could enhance Winchester's business environment. These may include small, unique specialty stores or larger chain stores that residents would like to see, such as the Gap. The plan should cover the town center and all other commercial and industrial areas, such as North Main Street, Cambridge Street, and Cross Street.

Retention strategies should consider ways to support large commercial businesses, such as the Stop 'n' Shop on North Main Street, and Winchester's small industrial center. The Stop 'n' Shop is an important business asset, as it serves as an anchor for the town center area. Few communities still have supermarkets located close to their downtown areas, and the Stop 'n' Shop will benefit residents of new mixed-use redevelopment projects in the town center area. The Town should focus on working with Stop 'n' Shop to ensure that it remains in its present location by helping the supermarket remodel, expand, and develop additional parking. Similarly, the Town should identify ways to support its industrial businesses in the Cross Street area. A real estate market analysis shows that

market interest exists in Winchester for small industrial spaces by craft, light industry, and other small start-up businesses that do not require truck transportation and have only modest employee parking needs. Good models for this type of industrial development can be found in neighboring Woburn along Salem Street and in the Cummings Industrial Park. The Town can support small industries by helping property owners with marketing activities.

► **Improve the appearance of Winchester’s commercial districts.**

Actions

Amend zoning overlays to add more detailed provisions that promote compatible new development and mitigate impacts on adjacent areas.

Winchester has few vacant parcels available for commercial or industrial development. New growth will come in the form of redevelopment, and the Town has an opportunity to shape this new development through zoning tools and design guidelines. Winchester already has the Village



New buildings in VCOD areas must have minimal setbacks from the street.

Center Overlay District in place at several key commercial intersections along North Main Street. The VCOD only requires minimal setbacks to ensure pedestrian-oriented businesses; all other provisions are the same as GBD-2 regulations. Although overlays are not necessary for all properties in the town’s commercial districts, they can be placed on key redevelopment areas, including nodes along North Main Street and areas of the town center that have the potential for change. The VCOD regulations are a good start, but they do not go far enough to address building character and relationship to neighboring properties. New overlay design guidelines should include more detailed provisions that address scale, massing, landscaping, and parking and ensure that new construction conforms to established character.

Involve the Design Review Committee in review of new construction in Winchester’s commercial areas and large projects that will have major impacts on the town.

The Design Review Committee can play an important role in evaluating infill projects in the town’s commercial areas. The Design Review Committee currently reviews proposed projects only at the request of the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen, and review is advisory only. In other Greater Boston area communities, the Design Review Committee plays a larger role in project review. In Wellesley, the Design Review Board (DRB) performs advisory review for both of Wellesley’s permit-granting authorities, the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and the Building Inspector, and plays a significant role in the

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project review process. Wellesley's DRB has the authority to review all non-single family residential projects that involve:

Major Construction

- Construction of 2,500 square feet or more of gross floor area
- An increase in gross floor area by at least 50% or more that is an increase of at least 2,500 square feet
- Regrading and/or disturbance of vegetative cover of at least 5,000 square feet of land
- Any activities regulated in the Flood Plain or Watershed Protection Districts or Water Supply Protection Districts

Minor Construction

- Any external change that is visible from a public or private street and requires a building permit
- Construction, enlargement, or alteration of a parking or storage area that requires a parking plan permit

Signs

- All sign permit applications submitted to the Town of Wellesley.

Wellesley's DRB evaluates site plans for Major Construction projects twice: once prior to submission to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and once after submission. In the preliminary review, the DRB makes suggestions to the applicant about design issues that should be modified before submission to the ZBA; in the second review, the DRB evaluates the plans and submits its recommendations to the ZBA to help the ZBA in its consideration of the project. For Minor Construction site plans, the DRB will review an applicant's plan once before the plan is submitted to the Building Inspector for a building permit. Recommendations will be forwarded to the Building Inspector to be considered along with the application for a building permit. Sign review (unless the sign requires a special permit) operates in the same manner as review of Minor Construction. The DRB evaluates all site plans and sign applications against five design criteria:

- Preservation and enhancement of landscaping
- Relation of buildings to their environment, including consideration of height, street façade(s), rhythm of solids and voids, spacing of buildings or signs, materials, textures, color(s), roof slopes, and scale
- Open space amenities
- Relation of signs to their environment
- Heritage, including consideration of removal or disruption of historic, traditional, or significant uses, structures, or architectural elements.

Winchester should expand the Design Review Committee's powers to involve this group in review of all new large non-single family residential projects or exterior alterations to existing commercial properties. Like Wellesley's DRB, the Design Review Committee should formulate a set of design criteria and formally identify the character of Winchester's different commercial areas. A zoning overlay with design guidelines



Streetscape improvements along North Main Street can make the corridor more attractive and safer for pedestrians.

for particular commercial areas should identify the Design Review Committee as a review board on all proposed projects within the overlay areas. Although the committee's review would remain advisory, the committee could help applicants understand context-sensitive design alternatives and

how they relate to the overlay's design guidelines. For any proposed projects that would affect nearby historic properties, the Design Review Committee could ask the Historical Commission for written input on a project-by-project basis.

Develop a North Main Street Commercial District Streetscape Plan.

North Main Street's present appearance differs greatly from many of the other main streets in Winchester. This corridor is part of the town's public realm, but does not communicate Winchester's unique, green character. North Main Street lacks continuous street trees and landscaping and is riddled with curb cuts, generic pole-mounted signs, and parking in front of businesses and on sidewalks. Streetscape improvements, including trees, benches, and limited curb cuts, can improve this corridor and make it a more safe, attractive, and inviting area for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. Corridor streetscape improvements will enhance its commercial appeal and also create more harmonious transitions to adjacent residential areas. The streetscape plan should be coordinated with new zoning standards for commercial areas to ensure that as business owners make improvements to refresh their properties, these standards will require private landscaping that complements public realm amenities.

Outside funding is available for streetscape improvements by including them in transportation projects or by applying for grants such as the state's ReLeaf Program that provides up to \$5,000 for tree-planting on public property.

Encourage shared parking and driveways, along with locating off-street parking to the rear of new businesses.

The current Zoning By-Law requires that all off-street parking in the GBD-2 and GBD-3 districts be provided on the same lot as the business unless a hardship exists. Different uses on the same lot may share off-street parking areas by right, but the by-law mandates that the total number of spaces provided be at least the number of spaces required for each use. Shared parking for different uses on the same lot is permitted by special permit if it can be demonstrated that peak parking needs are such that a lower total number of spaces will prove adequate for both uses. Many adjacent uses along North Main Street

lend themselves to shared parking, such as office buildings or funeral homes adjacent to multifamily units. The Zoning By-Law should be amended to allow shared parking between different businesses on different lots if peak parking hours for both uses are compatible.



Lots between different land uses offer opportunities for shared parking.

In addition, placing parking to the rear of buildings, encouraging shared driveways, and reducing front setbacks encourages a more pleasant, pedestrian-oriented environment. Rear parking and minimal setbacks allow buildings to meet the street and encourages walking in a more traditional “downtown” environment. Eliminating the number of curb cuts also makes the street environment safer for pedestrians using the commercial areas. The Zoning By-Law permits combined access drives in GBD-2 and GBD-3 districts by special permit. The Town should continue this practice and encourage new development to seek shared driveways with neighboring properties.

Revise and enforce the Sign By-Law to improve the design and reduce the number of signs in commercial districts.

Winchester’s commercial districts, particularly along North Main Street, have a large number of signs. The Sign By-Law permits commercial and industrial businesses to have exterior and window signs with a total area of two square feet times the length of the main entrance façade. Although some businesses have a single large sign, many small businesses have a number of small signs along walls and awnings and in windows. Larger businesses with front parking lots tend to have pole-mounted signs located along the street edge, and many of these are older signs that have been grandfathered in under the current by-law. The Sign By-Law should be revised to reduce the number of signs allowed at a single business and may also deal with design issues. However, the proliferation of signs may also indicate a need for greater code enforcement that cannot be addressed through by-law revisions.

GOAL: CREATE MIXED-USE ENVIRONMENTS IN THE TOWN CENTER.

- ▶ Encourage mixed-use redevelopment that includes upper-story residential and office uses to support demand for a diverse mix of retail and services.

Action

Allow mixed-use development by right in the CBD and identify private developers that could serve as partners for new projects in key town center redevelopment areas.

The town’s commercial areas, particularly the town center, attract patrons from Winchester and other communities. Business in the town center is good, but additional foot traffic could benefit existing retail and service providers. Two ways to increase foot



traffic involve constructing mixed-use development that includes residential units or office units over ground-floor retail and providing denser housing types—such as condominiums and apartments—within walking distance of major commercial areas. New, denser residential development supports retail better than office uses, as residents have a potential sales volume that is three times that of office workers. Residents also provide a patron base for “after 5:00” activities and can help restaurants and retail build their nighttime business.

In the long term, redevelopment can bring a mix of uses to the town center. New, higher-density condominium development already has occurred on Shore Road, which shows that a market exists for residential units that are close to the retail core and the commuter rail station. Adding stories to existing town center buildings has been discussed frequently, but it may not be feasible to disrupt existing businesses. Instead, redevelopment can include new, higher-density housing within the town center that is within walking distance of the commercial core. Making mixed-use development a by-right use in the town center can encourage compatible mixed-use infill projects. The Town owns several lots in the town center that offer opportunities for mixed-use redevelopment, such as the commuter rail station parking area and the area behind the public safety complex on Mount Vernon Street. The Town should identify the type of well-designed development that it seeks on these lots and find private developers with whom the Town could work to produce suitable projects. This also can help private owners understand the Town’s long-term vision for the town center (and other commercial areas).

Redevelopment scenarios for several key town center properties will be discussed in additional detail in Chapter 7.

GOAL: MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE TOWN CENTER’S WALKABLE VILLAGE CHARACTER.

► **Ensure compatible infill development.**

Action

Create design standards that promote redevelopment that respects the town center’s existing village-like character.

As discussed above, mixed-use redevelopment can bring new activity to the town center. The Planning Board can encourage appropriate redevelopment by instituting new zoning in the town center that will cover prime redevelopment areas. This zoning amendment should include standards that promote mixed-use development projects by allowing additional height and density and flexible off-street parking requirements. The zoning also should include design standards for projects exceeding certain size thresholds to create appropriate relationships to adjacent private properties and the public realm, such as consideration of scale, materials, wall articulation, entrances, and appropriate architectural elements. Design standards should ensure that new development will promote walkability and will be compatible with the town center’s traditional New England village character.

► **Improve parking access and management.**

Action

Develop a parking management plan that includes feasibility studies for structured parking.

Many residents and business owners feel that the town center needs more centralized parking for business patrons and commuter rail users. The Town should work with busi-



Improved parking management can help alleviate parking problems in the town center.

ness owners and the MBTA to develop a parking management plan for the town center. The plan should consider the use of short- and long-term spaces, designated employee parking areas, metered parking, and uniform signage identifying parking areas. Free parking encourages inefficient use of parking spaces unless timed spaces are effectively enforced. The plan also should consider the feasibility of adding new Town staff to improve parking enforcement. Structured parking may be an option for the town center, particularly on underutilized property adjacent to the commuter rail station. The parking management plan should include a feasibility analysis of a parking deck on this property and identify potential funding sources for parking projects, including public-private partnerships.

► **Address pedestrian and bicycle needs.**

Action

Improve connectivity and safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

Many users access the town center by foot or bicycle from nearby residential neighborhoods and schools. The Town should conduct an inventory of pedestrian and bicycle needs in the town center, including better connections to adjacent neighborhoods and schools, sidewalk improvements, additional bike racks and street furniture, and continuous pathways near the Aberjona River. Consideration should be given to connecting these routes to the Tri-Community Bikeway/Greenway, a new regional trail/bikeway that will follow the Aberjona River to the town center. Safety also can be improved—particularly near the traffic circle and along key routes to the middle and high schools—through adequate signalized crosswalks, continuous sidewalks, and, where appropriate, traffic calming devices.



Town center paths could be linked to regional greenways.

► Consider initiating a public art program.

Action

Work with community partners to find funding for public art projects and competitions.

The town center’s unique character can be enhanced through public art that adds to the sense of place. Some communities designate small portions of their budgets for public infrastructure improvements to public art. Art may include traditional static pieces or more interactive forms that add a sense of excitement to the central business district. Temporary installations and public art competitions can serve as a basis for townwide activities that draw residents and visitors to the town center and may feature works by local artists. Winchester’s Downtown Business Association currently sponsors “Art in August,” a month-long celebration of artwork by local artists that features art displays in town center businesses’ windows, meet-the-artist open houses, and “Art in the Park,” the culminating event that features art and entertainment in a day-long celebration on the Town Common. This program should be expanded to include periodic town center art events throughout the year. The Town should work with community cultural organizations, such as the Winchester Cultural Council, arts “friends” groups like the Winchester Artists’ Network, and community groups such as the Winchester Community Music School, the Winchester Historical Society, and the Griffin Museum of Photography, to investigate logistics and funding sources for a year-round public art program that would include art pieces in the town center and regular art events.



Art in August exhibit

GOAL: ATTRACT NEW CUSTOMERS TO THE TOWN CENTER AND OTHER COMMERCIAL AREAS.

► Support existing businesses and encourage the development of new businesses that can enhance the commercial mix.

Action

Work with the Chamber of Commerce to create marketing programs that improve Winchester’s “business-friendly” profile.

Winchester’s commercial areas can benefit from a coordinated marketing program for business recruitment. The Town and the Chamber of Commerce should work together to develop strategies to promote a “business-friendly” environment, including market studies, informational material on opening and operating a business in Winchester, guidance in the permitting process, and assistance to individuals who wish to start small businesses. Additional support could be provided through informational and networking workshops, links to the Chamber of Commerce’s business directory from the Town’s webpage, and local online business forums.

Provide marketing assistance to small, locally-owned businesses.

Winchester’s locally-owned businesses must compete regularly with chain stores found in retail centers in nearby communities. These unique businesses do not have a national or regional presence that draws in customers and typically do not have large advertising budgets. The Town can assist these small businesses with marketing by working with the Chamber of Commerce to encourage “buy local” campaigns, provide technical assistance on window presentation, and sponsor brochures and other public information items that promote Winchester’s commercial areas.

Seek to recruit businesses with an evening presence and encourage existing businesses to expand operating hours.

Special attention should be given to recruiting retail and restaurant businesses that will promote evening use of the town center and serve residents in new mixed-use projects. More town center residents and new nighttime uses can encourage existing merchants to extend operating hours. Additional evening businesses and expanded operating hours may attract residents from all Winchester neighborhoods who typically go to neighboring communities for nighttime dining and shopping. A number of communities have found success with once-a-week or once-a-month promotions when businesses stay open late and there are special events like outdoor concerts and movies or family-friendly activities.

► **Use cultural and community programming to attract new users to the town center.**

Action

Partner with community organizations to promote programming in the town center.

Community events can draw residents and visitors to commercial areas and increase retail sales. A regular schedule of community programming in the town center, including evening events, could provide additional foot traffic for local businesses. Several community groups already sponsor cultural events, but these typically are not well-attended due to a

lack of publicity. The Town should work with the Winchester Cultural Council and community groups, such as the Winchester Community Music School, the Town’s Recreation Department, the Griffin Museum, and the Winchester Public Schools to provide and publicize town center activities, and should ensure that event coordination includes local business owners. Programming may involve cultural activities and holiday events and should appeal to residents of all ages.



The Town can work with community art groups and institutions – such as the Griffin Museum – to promote town center programming.



GOAL: ENCOURAGE THE OPERATION OF HOME-BASED BUSINESSES AND INCUBATOR SPACE.

- ▶ Recognize the role that home-based businesses and incubator spaces play in Winchester’s economy and provide resources to support these small business owners.

Actions

Continue to ensure that local regulations support home-based businesses.

Winchester’s Zoning By-Law allows small offices offering professional services and “customary home occupations” to be operated in residential dwelling units. Office uses require a special permit and may not occupy more than 25% of a home or have more than one non-resident employee. “Customary home occupations” do not require a special permit, but are more restricted, as only family members may be employed. No product sales are permitted out of homes, barber/beauty shops are not allowed, and businesses may not be operated out of accessory structures. Zoning regulations also restrict the use of equipment and signs and prohibit off-street parking spaces from being located in front yards.

The Town should continue to balance the needs of home-based business owners and the interest of neighborhood residents in preserving quiet and safe residential neighborhoods. Regulations should ensure that traffic, lighting, and noise impacts will not interfere with residential neighborhood character and should control expanded uses or business floor area. Parking regulations could be amended to place a maximum limit on the number of off-street parking spaces that would be allowed on a residential lot containing a home-based business. The by-law could permit home-based businesses to operate out of accessory structures, such as garages with small second-floor offices. Also, owners of “customary home occupations” could benefit from being able to employ one non-family member, particularly if the home business involves highly-specialized services.

Partner with the Chamber of Commerce to provide workshops and marketing opportunities for home-based business owners.

Home-based businesses encourage entrepreneurship and promote sustainability through multiple uses of one property and decreased commuting activity. These small businesses may provide specialized services and grow over time to fill traditional office space and bring greater economic benefits to the town. Many home-based business owners, however, lack major business experience and have only modest marketing budgets. The Town and the Chamber of Commerce can partner to provide workshops for these owners on topics such as business management strategies, marketing techniques, regulations, and developing long-term business plans. Additional assistance can be provided by offering informational material, ensuring that home-based businesses are included in business directories, and offering networking opportunities for home-based business owners.

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Create new incubator spaces for small businesses in Winchester's existing industrial properties.

Many of the industrial properties in the Cross Street-River Street industrial area would be suitable as incubator spaces for small commercial or industrial businesses that do not require a large number of parking spaces or truck transportation. A new economic development specialist for the Town could work with the Chamber of Commerce and property owners to improve these industrial spaces and make them available at affordable rates to startup businesses.